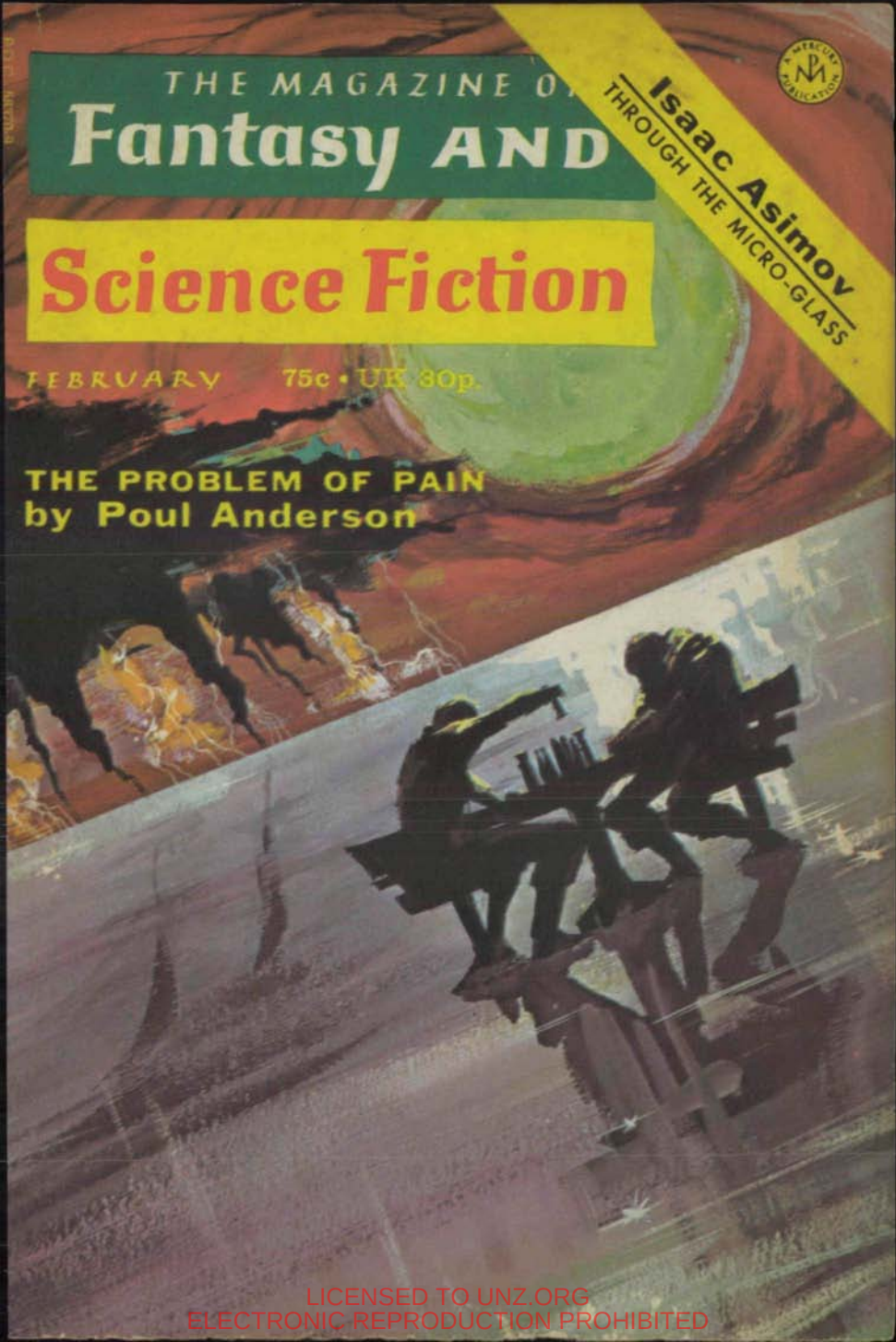

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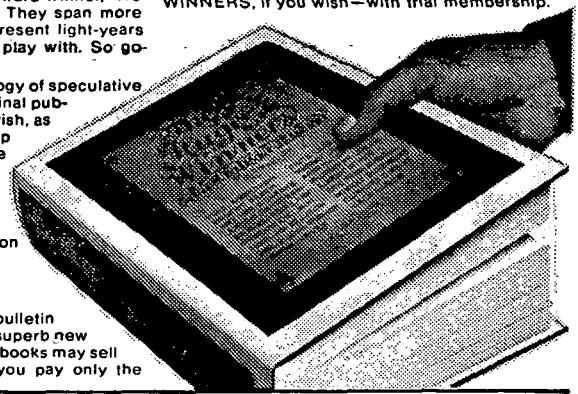

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Poul Anderson's last appearance here was in the Special Poul Anderson issue of April 1971 (and we still have a small supply of these issues, autographed by Mr. Anderson, $2.00 each). The feature story of the Anderson issue, "The Queen of Air and Darkness," has since won both the Hugo award as best novella and the Science Fiction Writers of America Nebula award as best novelette. (We called it a short novel.) Whatever the length, there is total agreement on the consistent high quality of Poul Anderson's stories. Here's a new one. It's about 9,000 words; enjoy.

The Problem of Pain

by POUL ANDERSON

MAYBE ONLY A CHRISTIAN can understand this story. In that case, I don't qualify. But I do take an interest in religion, as part of being an amateur psychologist, and—for the grandeur of its language if nothing else—a Bible is among the reels that accompany me wherever I go. This was one reason Peter Berg told me what had happened in his past. He desperately needed to make sense of it, and no priest he'd talked to had quite laid his questions to rest. There was an outside chance that an outside viewpoint like mine would see what a man couldn't who was within the faith.

His other reason was simple loneliness. We were on Lucifer, as part of a study corporation. That world is well named. It will never be a real colony for any beings whose ancestors evolved amidst clean greenery. But it might be marginally habitable, and if so, its mineral wealth would be worth exploiting. Our job was to determine whether that was true. The gentlest looking environment holds a thousand death traps until you have learned what the difficulties are and how to grip them. (Earth is no exception.) Sometimes you find problems which can't be solved economically, or can't be solved at all. Then you write off the area or the entire planet, and look for another.

We'd contracted to work three standard years on Lucifer. The pay was munificent, but presently we realized that no bank account could buy back

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one day we might have spent beneath a kindlier sun. It was a knowledge we carefully avoided discussing with teammates.

About midway through, Peter Berg and I were assigned to do an in-depth investigation of a unique cycle in the ecology of the northern middle latitudes. This meant that we settled down for weeks—which ran into months—in a sample region, well away from everybody else to minimize human disturbances. An occasional supply flitter gave us our only real contact; electronics were no proper substitute, especially when that hell-violent star was forever disrupting them.

Under such circumstances, you come to know your partner maybe better than you know yourself. Pete and I got along well. He's a big, sandy-haired, freckle-faced young man, altogether dependable, with enough kindliness, courtesy, and dignity that he need not make a show of them. Soft-spoken, he's a bit short in the humor department. Otherwise I recommend him as a companion. He has a lot to tell from his own wanderings, yet he'll listen with genuine interest to your memories and brags; he's well-read too, a good cook when his turn comes; he plays chess at just about my level of skill.

I already knew he wasn't from Earth, had in fact never been there, but from Aeneas, nearly 200 light-years distant, more than 300 from Lucifer. And, while he's gotten an education at the new little university in Nova Roma, he was raised in the outback. Besides, that town is only a far-off colonial capital. It helped explain his utter commitment to belief in a God who became flesh and died for love of man. Not that I scoff. When he said his prayers, night and morning in our one-room shelterdome, trustingly as a child, I didn't rag him nor he reproach me. Of course, over the weeks, we came more and more to talk about such matters.

At last he told me of that which haunted him.

We'd been out through the whole of one of Lucifer's long, long days; we'd toiled, we'd sweated, we'd itched and stunk and gotten grimy and staggered from weariness, we'd come near death once: and we'd found the uranium-concentrating root which was the key to the whole weirdness around us. We came back to base as day's fury was dying in the usual twilight gale; we washed, ate something, went to sleep with the hiss of storm-blown dust for a lullaby. Ten or twelve hours later we awoke and saw, through the vitryl panels, stars cold and crystalline beyond this thin air,

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auroras aflame, landscape hoar, and the twisted things we called trees all sheathed in glittering ice.

"Nothing we can do now till dawn," I said, "and we've earned a celebration." So we prepared a large meal, elaborate as possible—breakfast or supper, what relevance had that here? We drank wine in the course of it, and afterward much brandy while we sat, side by side in our loungers, watching the march of constellations which Earth never saw. And we talked. Finally we talked of God.

"—Maybe you can give me an idea," Pete said. In the dim light, his face bore a struggle. He stared before him and knotted his fingers.

"M-m, I dunno," I said carefully. "To be honest, no offense meant, theological conundrums strike me as silly."

He gave me a direct blue look. His tone was soft: "That is, you feel the paradoxes don't arise if we don't insist on believing?"

"Yes. I respect your faith, Pete, but it's not mine. And if I did suppose that a, well, a spiritual principle or something is behind the universe—" I gestured at the high and terrible sky—"in the name of reason, can we confine, can we understand whatever made *that*, in the bounds of one little dogma?"

"No. Agreed. How could finite minds grasp the infinite? We can see parts of it, though, that've been revealed to us." He drew breath. "'Way back before space travel, the Church decided Jesus had come only to Earth, to man. If other intelligent races need salvation—and obviously a lot of them do!—God will have made His suitable arrangements for them. Sure. However, this does not mean Christianity is not true, or that certain different beliefs are not false."

"Like, say, polytheism, wherever you find it?"

"I think so. Besides, religions evolve. The primitive faiths see God, or the gods, as power; the higher ones see Him as justice; the highest see Him as love." Abruptly he fell silent. I saw his fist clench, until he grabbed up his glass and drained it and refilled it in nearly a single savage motion.

"I must believe that," he whispered.

I waited a few seconds, in Lucifer's crackling night stillness, before saying: "An experience made you wonder?"

"Made me. . .disturbed. Mind if I tell you?"

"Certainly not." I saw he was about to open himself; and I may be an unbeliever, but I know what is sacred.

"Happened about five years ago. I was on my first real job.

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So was the—" his voice stumbled the least bit—"the wife I had then. We were fresh out of school and apprenticeship, fresh into marriage. Our employers weren't human. They were Ythrians. Ever heard of them?"

I sought through my head. The worlds, races, beings are unknowably many, in this tiny corner of this one dust-mote galaxy which we have begun to explore a little. "Ythrians, Ythrians. . .wait. Do they fly?"

"Yes. Surely one of the most glorious sights in creation. Your Ythrian isn't as heavy as a man, of course; adults mass around 25 or 30 kilos—but his wingspan goes up to six meters, and when he soars with those feathers shining gold-grown in the light, or stoops in a crack of thunder and whistle of wind—"

"Hold on," I said. "I take it Ythri's a terrestroid planet?"

"Pretty much. Somewhat smaller and drier than Earth, somewhat thinner atmosphere—about like Aeneas, in fact, which it's not too far from as interstellar spaces go. You can live there without special protection. The biochemistry's quite similar to ours."

"Then how the devil can those creatures be that size? The wing loading's impossible, when you have only cell tissue to oxidize for power. They'd never get off the ground."

"Ah, but they have antlibranchs as well." Pete smiled, though it didn't go deep. "Those look like three gills, sort of, on either side, below the wings. They're actually more like bellows, pumped by the wing muscles. Extra oxygen is forced directly into the bloodstream during flight. A biological supercharger system."

"Well, I'll be a. . .never mind what." I considered, in delight, this new facet of nature's inventiveness. "Um-m-m. . .if they spend energy at that rate, they've got to have appetites to match."

"Right. They're carnivores. A number of them are still hunters. The advanced societies are based on ranching. In either case, obviously, it takes a lot of meat animals, a lot of square kilometers, to support one Ythrian. So they're fiercely territorial. They live in small groups—single families or extended households—which attack, with intent to kill, any uninvited outsider who doesn't obey an order to leave."

"And still they're civilized enough to hire humans for space exploration?"

"Uh-huh. Remember, being flyers, they've never needed to huddle in cities in order to have ready communication. They do keep a few towns, mining or manufacturing centers, but those are inhabited mostly by

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wing-clipped slaves. I'm glad to say that institution's dying out as they get modern machinery."

"By trade?" I guessed.

"Yes," Pete replied. "When the first Grand Survey discovered them, their most advanced culture was at an Iron Age level of technology; no industrial revolution, but a lot of sophisticated minds around, and subtle philosophies." He paused. "That's important to my question—that the Ythrians, at least of the Planha-speaking *choths*, are not barbarians and have not been for many centuries. They've had their equivalents of Socrates, Aristotle, Confucius, Galileo, yes, and their prophets and seers."

After another mute moment: "They realized early what the visitors from Earth implied, and set about attracting traders and teachers. Once they had some funds, they sent their promising young folk off-planet to study. I met several at my own university, which is why I got my job offer. By now they have a few spacecraft and native crews. But you'll understand, their technical people are spread thin, and in several branches of knowledge they have no experts. So they employ humans."

He went on to describe the typical Ythrian: warm-blooded, feathered like a golden eagle (though more intricately) save for a crest on the head, and yet not a bird. Instead of a beak, a blunt muzzle full of fangs juts before two great eyes. The female bears her young alive. While she does not nurse them, they have lips to suck the juices of meat and fruits, wherefore their speech is not hopelessly unlike man's. What were formerly the legs have evolved into arms bearing three taloned fingers, flanked by two thumbs, on each hand. Aground, the huge wings fold downward and, with the help of claws at the angles, give locomotion. That is slow and awkward—but aloft, ah!

"They become more alive, flying, than we ever do," Pete murmured. His gaze had lost itself in the shuddering auroras overhead. "They must: the metabolic rate they have then, and the space around them, speed, sky, a hundred winds to ride on and be kissed by.... That's what made me think Enherrian, in particular, believed more keenly than I could hope to. I saw him and others dancing, high, high in the air, swoops, glides, hoverings, sunshine molten on their plumes; I asked what they did, and was told they were honoring God."

He sighed. "Or that's how I translated the Planha phrase, rightly or wrongly," he went

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on. "Olga and I had taken a cram course, and our Ythrian teammates all knew Anglic; but nobody's command of the foreign tongue was perfect. It couldn't be. Multiple billion years of separate existence, evolution, history—what a miracle that we could think as alike as we did!

"However, you could call Enherrian religious, same as you could call me that, and not be too grotesquely off the mark. The rest varied, just like humans. Some were also devout, some less, some agnostics or atheists; two were pagans, following the bloody rites of what was called the Old Faith. For that matter, my Olga—"the knuckles stood forth where he grasped his tumbler of brandy—"had tried, for my sake, to believe as I did, and couldn't.

"Well. The New Faith interested me more. It was new only by comparison—at least half as ancient as mine. I hoped for a chance to study it, to ask questions and compare ideas. I really knew nothing except that it was monotheistic, had sacraments and a theology though no official priesthood, upheld a high ethical and moral standard—for Ythrians, I mean. You can't expect a race which can only live by killing animals, and has an oestrous cycle, and is incapable by instinct of maintaining what we'd recognize as a true nation or government, and on and on—you can't expect them to resemble Christians much. God has given them a different message. I wished to know what. Surely we could learn from it." Again he paused. "After all. . .being a faith with a long tradition. . .and not static but a seeking, a history of prophets and saints and believers. . .I thought it must know God is love. Now what form would God's love take to an Ythrian?"

He drank. I did too, before asking cautiously: "Uh, where was this expedition?"

Pete stirred in his lounger. "To a system about 80 light-years from Ythri's," he answered. "The original survey crew had discovered a terrestroid planet there. They didn't bother to name it. Prospective colonists would choose their own name anyway. Those could be human or Ythrian, conceivably both—if the environment proved out.

"Offhand, the world—our group called it, unofficially, Gray, after that old captain—the world looked brilliantly promising. It's intermediate in size between Earth and Ythri, surface gravity 0.8 terrestrial; slightly more irradiation, from a somewhat yellower sun, than Earth gets, which simply makes it a little warmer; axial tilt, therefore seasonal variations, a

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bit less than terrestrial; length of year about three-quarters of ours, length of day a bit under half; one small, close-in, bright moon; biochemistry similar to ours—we could eat most native things, though we'd require imported crops and livestock to supplement the diet. All in all, seemingly well-nigh perfect."

"Rather remote to attract Earthlings at this early date," I remarked. "And from your description, the Ythrians won't be able to settle it for quite a while either."

"They think ahead," Pete responded. "Besides, they have scientific curiosity and, yes, in them perhaps even more than in the humans who went along, a spirit of adventure. Oh, it was a wonderful thing to be young in that band!"

He had not yet reached 30, but somehow his cry was not funny.

He shook himself. "Well, we had to make sure," he said. "Besides planetology, ecology, chemistry, oceanography, meteorology, a million and a million mysteries to unravel for their own sakes—we must scout out the death traps, whatever those might be.

"At first everything went like Mary's smile on Christmas morning. The spaceship set us off—it couldn't be spared to linger in orbit—and we established base on the largest continent. Soon our hundred-odd dispersed across the globe, investigating this or that. Olga and I made part of a group on the southern shore, where a great gulf swarmed with life. A strong current ran eastward from there, eventually striking an archipelago which deflected it north. Flying over those waters, we spied immense, I mean immense patches—no, floating islands—of vegetation, densely interwoven, grazed on by monstrous marine creatures, no doubt supporting any number of lesser plant and animal species.

"We wanted a close look. Our camp's sole aircraft wasn't good for that. Anyhow, it was already in demand for a dozen jobs. We had boats, though, and launched one. Our crew was Enherrian, his wife Whell, their grown children Rusa and Arrach, my beautiful new bride Olga, and me. We'd take three or four Gray days to reach the nearest atlantis weed, as Olga dubbed it. Then we'd be at least a week exploring before we turned back—a vacation, a lark, a joy."

He tossed off his drink and reached for the bottle. "You ran into grief," I prompted.

"No." He bent his lips upward, stiffly. "It ran into us. A hurricane. Unpredicted; we knew very little about that planet. Given the higher solar

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energy input and, especially, the rapid rotation, the storm was more violent than would've been possible on Earth. We could only run and pray.

"At least, I prayed, and imagined that Enherrian did."

Wind shrieked, hooted, yammered, hit flesh with fists and cold knives. Waves rumbled in that driven air, black and green and fang-white, fading from view as the sun sank behind the cloud-roil which hid it. Often a monster among them loomed castle-like over the gunwale. The boat slipped by, spilled into the troughs, rocked onto the crests and down again. Spindrift, icy, stinging, bitter on lips and tongue, made a fog across her length.

"We'll live if we can keep sea room," Enherrian had said when the fury first broke. "She's well-found. The engine capacitors have ample kilowatt-hours in them. Keep her bow on and we'll live."

But the currents had them now, where the mighty gulf stream met the outermost islands and its waters churned, recoiled, spun about and fought. Minute by minute, the riptides grew wilder. They made her yaw till she was broadside on and surges roared over her deck; they shocked her onto her beam ends, and the hull became a toning bell.

Pete, Olga, and Whell were in the cabin, trying to rest before their next watch. That was no longer possible. The Ythrian female locked hands and wing-claws around the net-covered framework wherein she had slept, hung on and uttered nothing. In the wan glow of a single overhead fluoro, among thick restless shadows, her eyes gleamed topaz. They did not seem to look at the crampedness around—at what, then?

The humans had secured themselves by a line onto a lower bunk. They embraced, helping each other fight the leaps and swings which tried to smash them against the sides. Her fair hair on his shoulder was the last brightness in his cosmos. "I love you," she said, over and over, through hammer blows and groans. "Whatever happens, I love you, Pete, I thank you for what you've given me."

"And you," he would answer. *And You*, he would think. *Though You won't take her, not yet, will You? Me, yes, if that's Your Will. But not Olga. It'd leave Your creation too dark.*

A wing smote the cabin door. Barely to be heard through the storm, an Ythrian voice—high, whistly, but resonant out of full lungs—shouted: "Come topside!"

Whell obeyed at once, the

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Bergs as fast as they could slip on life jackets. Having taken no personal grav units along, they couldn't fly free if they went overboard. Dusk raved around them. Pete could just see Rusa and Arrach in the stern, fighting the tiller. Enherrian stood before him and pointed forward. "Look," the captain said. Pete, who had no nictitating membranes, must shield his eyes with fingers to peer athwart the hurricane. He saw a deeper darkness hump up from a wall of white; he heard surf crash.

"We can't pull free," Enherrian told him. "Between wind and current—too little power. We'll likely be wrecked. Make ready."

Olga's hand went briefly to her mouth. She huddled against Pete and might have whispered, "Oh, no." Then she straightened, swung back down into the cabin, braced herself as best she could, and started assembling the most vital things. He saw that he loved her still more than he had known.

The same calm descended on him. Nobody had time to be afraid. He got busy too. The Ythrians could carry a limited weight of equipment and supplies. but sharply limited under these conditions. The humans, buoyed by their jackets, must carry most. They strapped it to their bodies.

When they re-emerged, the boat was in the shoals. Enherrian ordered them to take the rudder. His wife, son, and daughter stood around—on hands which clutched the rails with prey-snatching strength—and spread their wings to give a bit of shelter. The captain clung to the cabin top as lookout. His yelled commands reached the Bergs dim, tattered.

"Hard right!" Upward cataracts burst on a skerry to port. It glided past, was lost in murk. "Two points starboard—steady!" The hull slipped between a pair of rocks. Ahead was a narrow opening in the island's sheer black face. To a lagoon, to safety? Surf raged on either side of that gate, and everywhere else.

The passage was impossible. The boat struck, threw Olga off her feet and Arrach off her perch. Full reverse engine could not pull free. The deck canted. A billow and a billow smashed across.

Pete was in the water. It grabbed him, pulled him under, dragged him over a sharp bottom. He thought: *Into Your hands, God. Spare Olga, please, please*—and the sea spewed him back up for one gulp of air.

Wallowing in blindness, he tried to gauge how the breakers were acting, what he should do. If he could somehow belly-surf in, he might make it, he barely

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might. . . . He was on the neck of a rushing giant, it climbed and climbed, it shoved him forward at what he knew was lunatic speed. He saw the reef on which it was about to smash him and knew he was dead.

Talons closed on his jacket. Air brawled beneath wings. The Ythrian could not raise him, but could draw him aside. . .the bare distance needed, and Pete went past the rock whereon his bones were to have been crushed, down into the smother and chaos beyond. The Ythrian didn't break free in time. He glimpsed the plumes go under, as he himself did. They never rose.

He beat on, and on, without end.

He floated in water merely choppy, swart palisades to right and left, a slope of beach ahead. He peered into the clamorous dark and found nothing. "Olga," he croaked. "Olga. Olga."

Wings shadowed him among the shadows. "Get ashore before an undertow eats you!" Enherrian whooped, and beat his way off in search.

Pete crawled to gritty sand, fell, and let annihilation have him. He wasn't unconscious long. When he revived, Rusa and Whell were beside him. Enherrian was further inland. The captain hauled on a line he had snubbed around a tree. Olga floated at the other end. She had no strength left, but he had passed a bight beneath her arms and she was alive.

At wolf-gray dawn the wind had fallen to gale force or maybe less, and the cliffs shielded lagoon and strand from it. Overhead it shrilled, and outside the breakers cannonaded, their rage aquiver through the island. Pete and Olga huddled together, a shared cloak across their shoulders. Enherrian busied himself checking the salvaged material. Whell sat on the hindbones of her wings and stared seaward. Moisture gleamed on her grizzled feathers like tears.

Rusa flew in from the reefs and landed. "No trace," he said. His voice was emptied by exhaustion. "Neither the boat nor Arrach." Through the rust in his own brain, Pete noticed the order of those words.

Nevertheless—He leaned toward the parents and brother of Arrach, who had been beautiful and merry and had sung to them by moonlight. "How can we say—?" he began, realized he didn't have Planha words, and tried in Anglic: "How can we say how sorry we both are?"

"No necessity," Rusa answered.

"She died saving me!"

"And what you were carrying, which we needed badly." Some energy returned to Rusa.

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He lifted his head and its crest. "She had deathpride, our lass."

Afterward Pete, in his search for meaning, would learn about that Ythrian concept. "Courage" is too simple and weak a translation. Certain Old Japanese words came closer, though they don't really bear the same value either.

Whell turned her hawk gaze full upon him. "Did you see anything of what happened in the water?" she asked. He was too unfamiliar with her folk to interpret the tone; today he thinks it was loving. He did know that, being creatures of seasonal rut, Ythrians are less sexually motivated than man is, but probably treasure their young even more. The strongest bond between male and female is children, who are what life is all about.

"No, I. . .I fear not," he stammered.

Enherrian reached out to lay claws, very gently and briefly, on his wife's back. "Be sure she fought well," he said. "She gave God honor." (Glory? Praise? Adoration? His due?)

Does he mean she prayed, made her confession, while she drowned? The question dragged itself through Pete's weariness and caused him to murmur: "She's in heaven now." Again he was forced to use Anglic words.

Enherrian gave him a look which he could have sworn was startled. "What do you say? Arrach is dead."

"Why, her. . .her spirit—"

"Will be remembered in pride." Enherrian resumed his work.

Olga said it for Pete: "So you don't believe the spirit outlives the body?"

"How could it?" Enherrian snapped. "Why should it?" His motions, his posture, the set of his plumage added: Leave me alone.

Pete thought: *Well, many faiths, including high ones, including some sects which call themselves Christian, deny immortality. How sorry I feel for these my friends, who don't know they will meet their beloved afresh!*

They will, regardless. It makes no sense that God, Who created what is because in His goodness He wished to share existence, would shape a soul only to break it and throw it way.

Never mind. The job on hand is to keep Olga alive, in her dear body. "Can I help?"

"Yes, check our medical kit," Enherrian said.

It had come through undamaged in its box. The items for human use—stimulants, sedatives, anesthetics, antitoxins, antibiotics, coagulants, healing promoters, et standard cetera—naturally outnumbered those

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for Ythrians. There hasn't been time to develop a large scientific pharmacopoeia for the latter species. True, certain materials work on both, as does the surgical and monitoring equipment. Pete distributed pills which took the pain out of bruises and scrapes, the heaviness out of muscles. Meanwhile Rusa collected wood, Whell started and tended a fire, Olga made breakfast. They had considerable food, mostly freeze-dried, gear to cook it, tools like knives and a hatchet, cord, cloth, flashbeams, two blasters and abundant recharges: what they required for survival.

"It may be insufficient," Enherrian said. "The portable radio transceiver went down with Arrach. The boat's transmitter couldn't punch a call through that storm, and now the boat's on the bottom—nothing to see from the air, scant metal to register on a detector."

"Oh, they'll check on us when the weather slacks off," Olga said. She caught Pete's hand in hers. He felt the warmth.

"If their flitter survived the hurricane, which I doubt," Enherrian stated. "I'm convinced the camp was also struck. We had built no shelter for the flitter, our people will have been too busy saving themselves to secure it, and I think that thin shell was tumbled about and broken. If I'm right, they'll have to call for an aircraft from elsewhere, which may not be available at once. In either case, we could be anywhere in a huge territory; and the expedition has no time or personnel for an indefinite search. They will seek us, aye; however, if we are not found before an arbitrary date—"A ripple passed over the feathers of face and neck; a human would have shrugged.

"What. . .can we do?" the girl asked.

"Clear a sizable area in a plainly artificial pattern, or heap fuel for beacon fires should a flitter pass within sight—whichever is practicable. If nothing comes of that, we should consider building a raft or the like."

"Or modify a life jacket for me," Rusa suggested, "and I can try to fly to the mainland."

Enherrian nodded. "We must investigate the possibilities. First let's get a real rest."

The Ythrians were quickly asleep, squatted on their locked wing joints like idols of a forgotten people. Pete and Olga felt more excited and wandered a distance off, hand in hand.

Above the crag-enclosed beach, the island rose toward a crest which he estimated as three kilometers way. If it was in the middle, this was no large

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piece of real estate. Nor did he see adequate shelter. A mat of mossy, intensely green plants squeezed out any possibility of forest. A few trees stood isolated. Their branches tossed in the wind. He noticed particularly one atop a great outcrop nearby, gaunt brown trunk and thin leaf-fringed boughs that whipped insanely about. Blossoms, torn from vines, flew past, and they were gorgeous; but there would be naught to live on here, and he wasn't hopeful about learning, in time, how to catch Gray's equivalent of fish.

"Strange about them, isn't it?" Olga murmured.

"Eh?" He came startled out of his preoccupations.

She gestured at the Ythrians. "Them. The way they took poor Arrach's death."

"Well, you can't judge them by our standards. Maybe they feel grief less than we would, or maybe their culture demands stoicism." He looked at her and did not look away again. "To be frank, darling, I can't really mourn either. I'm too happy to have you back."

"And I you—oh, Pete, Pete, my only—"

They found a secret spot and made love. He saw nothing wrong in that. Do you ever in this life come closer to the wonder which is God?

Afterward they returned to their companions. Thus the clash of wings awoke them, hours later. They scrambled from their bedrolls and saw the Ythrians swing aloft.

The wind was strong and loud as yet, though easing off in fickleness, flaws, downdrafts, whirls and eddies. Clouds were mostly gone. Those which remained raced gold and hot orange before a sun low in the west, across blue serenity. The lagoon glittered purple, the greensward lay aglow. It had warmed up till rich odors of growth, of flowers, blent with the sea-salt.

And splendid in the sky danced Enherrian, Whell, and Rusa. They wheeled, soared, pounced and rushed back into light which ran molten off their pinions. They chanted, and fragments blew down to the humans: "*High flew your spirit on many winds. . .be always remembered. . . .*"

"What *is* that?" Olga breathed.

"Why, they—they—" The knowledge broke upon Pete. "They're holding a service for Arrach."

He knelt and said a prayer for her soul's repose. But he wondered if she, who had belonged to the air, would truly want rest. And his eyes could not leave her kindred.

Enherrian screamed a hunter's challenge and rushed down

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at the earth. He flung himself meteoric past the stone outcrop Pete had seen; for an instant the man gasped, believing he would be shattered; then he rose, triumphant.

He passed by the lean tree of thin branches. Gusts flailed them about. A nearly razor edge took off his left wing. Blood spurted; Ythrian blood is royal purple. Somehow Enherrian slewed around and made a crash landing on the bluff top just beyond range of what has since been named the surgeon tree.

Pete yanked the medikit to him and ran. Olga wailed, briefly, and followed. When they reached the scene, they found that Whell and Rusa had pulled feathers from their breasts to try staunching the wound.

Evening, night, day, evening, night.

Enherrian sat before a campfire. Its light wavered, picked him red out of shadow and let him half vanish again, save for the unblinking yellow eyes. His wife and son supported him. Stim, cell-freeze, and plasma surrogate had done their work, and he could speak in a weak roughness. The bandages on his stump were a glaring white.

Around crowded shrubs which, by day, showed low and russet-leaved. They filled a hollow on the far side of the island, to which Enherrian had been carried in an improvised litter. Their odor was rank, in an atmosphere once more subtropically hot, and they clutched at feet with raking twigs. But this was the most sheltered spot his companions could find, and he might die in a new storm on the open beach.

He looked through smoke, at the Bergs, who sat as close together as they were able. He said—the surf growled faintly beneath his words, while never a leaf rustled in the breathless dark—"I have read that your people can make a lost part grow forth afresh."

Pete couldn't answer. He tried but couldn't. It was Olga who had the courage to say, "We can do it for ourselves. None except ourselves." She laid her head on her man's breast and wept.

Well, you need a lot of research to unravel a genetic code, a lot of development to make the molecules of heredity repeat what they did in the womb. Science hasn't had time yet for other races. It never will for all. They are too many.

"As I thought," Enherrian said. "Nor can a proper prosthesis be engineered in my lifetime. I have few years left; an Ythrian who cannot fly soon becomes sickly."

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"Grav units—" Pete faltered.

The scorn in those eyes was like a blow. Dead metal to raise you, who have had wings?

Fierce and haughty though the Ythrian is, his quill-clipped slaves have never rebelled: for they are only half alive. Imagine yourself, human male, castrated. Enherrian might flap his remaining wing and the stump to fill his blood with air; but he would have nothing he could do with that extra energy, it would turn inward and corrode his body, perhaps at last his mind.

For a second, Whell laid an arm around him.

"You will devise a signal tomorrow," Enherrian said, "and start work on it. Too much time has already been wasted."

Before they slept, Pete managed to draw Whell aside. "He needs constant care, you know," he whispered to her in the acrid booming gloom. "The drugs got him over the shock, but he can't tolerate more, and he'll be very weak."

True, she said with feathers rather than voice. Aloud: "Olga shall nurse him. She cannot get around as easily as Rusa or I, and lacks your physical strength. Besides, she can prepare meals and the like for us."

Pete nodded absently. He had a dread to explain. "Uh. . .uh. . .do you think—well, I mean in your ethic, in the New Faith—might Enherrian put an end to himself?" And he wondered if God would really blame the captain.

Her wings and tail spread, her chest erected, she glared. "You say that of him?" she shrilled. Seeing his concern, she eased, even made a *krrr* noise which might answer to a chuckle. "No, no, he has his deathpride. He would never rob God of honor."

After survey and experiment, the decision was to hack a giant cross in the island turf. That growth couldn't be ignited, and what wood was burnable—deadfall—was too scant and stingy of smoke for a beacon.

The party had no spades; the vegetable mat was thick and tough; the toil became brutal. Pete, like Whell and Rusa, would return to camp and topple into sleep. He wouldn't rouse till morning, to gulp his food and stumble off to labor. He grew gaunt, bearded, filthy, numb-brained, sore in every cell.

Thus he did not notice how Olga was waning. Enherrian was mending, somewhat, under her care. She did her jobs, which were comparatively light, and would have been ashamed to complain of headaches, giddiness, diarrhea, and nausea.

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Doubtless she imagined she suffered merely from reaction to disaster, plus a sketchy and ill-balanced diet, plus heat and brilliant sun and—she'd cope.

The days were too short for work, the nights too short for sleep. Pete's terror was that he would see a flitter pass and vanish over the horizon before the Ythrians could hail it. Then they might try sending Rusa for help. But that was a long, tricky flight; and the gulf coast camp was due to be struck soon.

Sometimes he wondered dimly how he and Olga might do if marooned on Gray. He kept enough wits to dismiss that fantasy for what it was. Take the simple fact that native life appeared to lack certain vitamins—

Then one darkness, perhaps a terrestrial week after the shipwreck, he was aroused by her crying his name. He struggled to wakefulness. She lay beside him. Gray's moon was up, nearly full, swifter and brighter than Luna. Its glow drowned most of the stars, frosted the encroaching bushes, fell without pity to show him her fallen cheeks and rolling eyes. She shuddered in his arms; he heard her teeth clapping. "I'm cold, darling, I'm cold," she said in the subtropical summer night. She vomited over him, and presently she was delirious.

The Ythrians gave what help they could, he what medicines he could. By sunrise (an outrageousness of rose and gold and silver-blue, crossed by the jubilant wings of waterfowl) he knew she was dying.

He examined his own physical state, using a robot he discovered he had in his skull: yes, his wretchedness was due to more than overwork, he saw that now; he too had had the upset stomach and the occasional shivers, nothing like the disintegration which possessed Olga, nevertheless the same kind of thing. Yet the Ythrians stayed healthy. Did a local germ attack humans while finding the other race undevourable?

The rescuers, who came on the island two Gray days later, already had the answer. That genus of bushes is widespread on the planet. A party elsewhere, after getting sick and getting into safety suits, analyzed its vapors. They are a cumulative poison to man; they scarcely harm an Ythrian. The analysts named it the hell shrub.

Unfortunately, their report wasn't broadcast until after the boat left. Meanwhile Pete had been out in the field every day, while Olga spent her whole time in the hollow, over which the sun regularly created an inversion layer.

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Whell and Rusa went grimly back to work. Pete had to get away. He wasn't sure of the reason, but he had to be alone when he screamed at heaven, "Why did You do this to her, why did You do it?" Enherrian could look after Olga, who had brought him back to a life he no longer wanted. Pete had stopped her babblings, writhings, and saw-toothed sounds of pain with a shot. She ought to sleep peacefully into that death which the monitor instruments said was, in the absence of hospital facilities, ineluctable.

He stumbled off to the heights. The sea reached calm, in a thousand hues of azure and green, around the living island, beneath the gentle sky. He knelt in all that emptiness and put his question.

After an hour he could say, "Your will be done," and return to camp.

Olga lay awake. "Pete, Pete!" she cried. Anguish distorted her voice till he couldn't recognize it; nor could he really see her in the yellowed sweating skin and lank hair drawn over a skeleton, or find her in the stench and the nails which flayed him as they clutched. "Where were you, hold me close, it hurts, how it hurts—"

He gave her a second injection, to small effect.

He knelt again, beside her. He has not told me what he said, or how. At last she grew quiet, gripped him hard, and waited for the pain to end.

When she died, he said, it was like seeing a light blown out.

He laid her down, closed eyes and jaw, folded her hands. On mechanical feet he went to the pup tent which had been rigged for Enherrian. The cripple calmly awaited him. "She is fallen?" he asked.

Pete nodded.

"That is well," Enherrian said.

"It is not," Pete heard himself reply, harsh and remote. "She shouldn't have aroused. The drug should've— Did you give her a stim shot? Did you bring her back to suffer?"

"What else?" said Enherrian, though he was unarmed and a blaster lay nearby for Pete to seize. *Not that I'll ease him out of his fate!* went through the man in a spasm. "I saw that you, distraught, had misgauged. You were gone and I unable to follow you. She might well die before your return."

Out of his void, Pete gaped into those eyes. "You mean," rattled from him, "you mean . . .she. . .mustn't?"

Enherrian crawled forth—he could only crawl, on his single wing—to take Pete's hands. "My friend," he said, his tone

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immeasurably compassionate, "I honored you both too much to deny her her deathpride."

Pete's chief awareness was of the cool sharp talons.

"Have I misunderstood?" asked Enherrian anxiously. "Did you not wish her to give God a battle?"

Even on Lucifer, the nights finally end. Dawn blazed on the tors when Pete finished his story.

I emptied the last few cc. into our glasses. We'd get no work done today. "Yeh," I said. "Cross-cultural semantics. Given the best will in the universe, two beings from different planets—or just different countries, often—take for granted they think alike; and the outcome can be tragic."

"I assumed that at first," Pete said. "I didn't need to forgive Enherrian—how could he know? For his part, he was puzzled when I buried my darling. On Ythri they cast them from a great height into wilderness. But neither race wants to watch the rotting of what was loved, and so he did his lame best to help me."

He drank, looked as near the cruel bluish sun as he was able, and mumbled, "What I couldn't do was forgive God."

"The problem of evil," I said.

"Oh, no. I've studied these matters, these past years: read theology, argued with priests, the whole route. Why does God, if He is a loving and personal God, allow evil? Well, there's a perfectly good Christian answer to that. Man—intelligence everywhere—must have free will. Otherwise we're puppets and have no reason to exist. Free will necessarily includes the capability of doing wrong. We're here, in this cosmos during our lives, to learn how to be good of our unforced choice."

"I spoke illiterately," I apologized. "All that brandy. No, sure, your logic is right, regardless of whether I accept your premises or not. What I meant was: the problem of pain. Why does a merciful God permit undeserved agony? If He's omnipotent, He isn't compelled to.

"I'm not talking about the sensation which warns you to take your hand from the fire, anything useful like that. No, the random accident which wipes out a life. . .or a mind—" I drank. "What happened to Arrach, yes, and to Enherrian, and Olga, and you, and Whell. What happens when a disease hits, or those catastrophes we label acts of God. Or the slow decay of us if we grow very old. Every such horror. Never mind if science has licked some of them; we have enough left, and

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then there were our ancestors who endured them all.

"Why? What possible purpose is served? It's not adequate to declare we'll receive an unbounded reward after we die, and therefore it makes no difference whether a life was gusty or grisly. That's no explanation.

"Is this the problem you're grappling, Pete?"

"In a way." He nodded, cautiously, as if he were already his father's age. "At least, it's the start of the problem.

"You see, there I was, isolated among Ythrians. My fellow humans sympathized, but they had nothing to say that I didn't know already. The New Faith, however. . . .Mind you, I wasn't about to convert. What I did hope for was an insight, a freshness, that'd help me make Christian sense of our losses. Enherrian was so sure, so learned, in his beliefs—

"We talked, and talked, and talked, while I was regaining my strength. He was as caught as I. Not that he couldn't fit our troubles into his scheme of things. That was easy. But it turned out that the New Faith has no satisfactory answer to the problem of *evil.* It says God allows wickedness so that we may win honor by fighting for the right. Really, when you stop to think, that's weak, especially in carnivore Ythrian terms. Don't you agree?"

"You know them, I don't," I sighed. "You imply they have a better answer to the riddle of pain than your own religion does."

"It seems better." Desperation edged his slightly blurred tone:

"They're hunters, or were until lately. They see God like that, as the Hunter. Not the Torturer—you absolutely must understand this point—no, He rejoices in our happiness the way we might rejoice to see a game animal gamboling. Yet at last He comes after us. Our noblest moment is when we, knowing He is irresistible, give Him a good chase, give him a good fight.

"Then He wins honor. And some infinite end is furthered. (The same one as when my God is given praise? How can I tell?) We're dead, struck down, lingering at most a few years in the memories of those who escaped this time. And that's what we're here for. That's why God created the universe."

"And this belief is old," I said. "It doesn't belong just to a few cranks. No, it's been held for centuries by millions of sensitive, intelligent, educated beings. You can live by it, you can die by it. If it doesn't solve every paradox, it solves some that your faith won't, quite. This is your dilemma, true?"

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He nodded again. "The priests have told me to deny a false creed and to acknowledge a mystery. Neither instruction feels right. Or am I asking too much?"

"I'm sorry, Pete," I said, altogether honestly. It hurt. "But how should I know? I looked into the abyss once, and saw nothing, and haven't looked since. You keep looking. Which of us is the braver?

"Maybe you can find a text in Job. I don't know, I tell you, I don't know."

The sun lifted higher above the burning horizon.

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JOANNA RUSS

BOOKS

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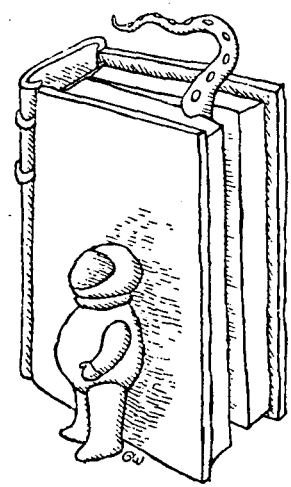

OUTSIDERS MEAN BAD AND stupid things when they say "science fiction," but sometimes the bad and stupid things are unfortunately accurate. In the 1930's even the most simple-minded tale written for bright, white, male, conventional fourteen-year-olds had some shock-and-novelty value (because of its context), but the same thing written and published in the 1970's is another kettle of Venusian fishoids. (Some day s.f. writers will stop tacking "oid" onto nouns. We may even stop having our characters drink coffee under other names like Anne McCaffrey's "klah".)

PANDORA'S PLANET by Christopher Anvil turns on one naive joke: that we are smarter than the aliens who invade us. Human chauvinism seems fairly harmless—after all, how many giant ants have been demonstrating for civil rights lately?—but PANDORA does not really include all humans. If "America" is geography and "Amerika" the radical-left nightmare, then PANDORA is pure *Amurrica*—women, children, non-whites, non-Americans, homosexuals, the poor, even the genuinely religious, need not apply. Even the invading aliens (to judge from the book's details) are white, male, American, middle-class, and middle-aged. A fan writer recently

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characterized one type of s.f. fan as The Galactic Square. PANDORA'S PLANET is written for The Galactic Square. If we lived in a sensuous, emotional, erotically permissive, egalitarian, heterogeneous, more-or-less matriarchy, Mr. Anvil's novel would be a stunning piece of speculation. I've been kind to routine s.f. in the past, but PANDORA doesn't have the energy or luridness that can make s.f. stereotypes minimally interesting. The central joke isn't even new; a fine story written in the 1950s from the viewpoint of a human con-man ends with the aliens being sold the Brooklyn Bridge. And then one has to put up with PANDORA's conviction that intelligence means only technical or military ingenuity, with emphasis on the latter (Einstein would not be at home here), that all humans have I.Q.s of 130 or above, that a *deus ex machina* is a good way to end a dramatic conflict (the book has two of them), and that Communism and Fascism are silly-simple decals. The only funny episode in the novel is one in which the alien hero undergoes a spell of deep depression brought on by watching TV.

James Blish once spotted a bad flaw typical of certain s.f.—the Smeerp business. That is, if you have rabbits in a story and want to make the story s.f., you change "rabbits" to "smeerps" and there you are.* PANDORA'S details are often Smeerps: "What we are giving you is no perfumed hammock of sweet flowers" (*bed of roses*, p. 74), "iron road" for railroad (*chemin-de-fer*, p. 86) a Huntley-Brinkley newscast (pp. 147-8) and so on. It is all racist, sexist, antiseptic, and good-humored, and The Galactic Square would love it. The best (or worst) *frisson* comes early, on p. 22:

> "We can't help it!" sobbed several voices in unison, "they're smarter than we are."

I can't help it, either.

Lloyd Biggle must be writing for the same audience, for although THE LIGHT THAT NEVER WAS is more completely dramatized than PANDORA and more colorful, it's just as bad. There is the same failure in dramatic resolution (a "plague" of hatred on two dozen worlds demands more of a cause than a single, mad, unscrupulous—and dull—millionaire), the same Smeerps ("wrranels" instead of oxen or horses, "revs" instead of parties, "lumeno console" instead of piano-playing or card games, and so on). The book's message

* *William Atheling, Jr. [James Blish]*, The Issue at Hand, *Advent Publishers, Chicago, 1964, p. 92.*

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seems to be that one ought to consider unhuman sophonts ("animaloids") one's brothers; that is why a horse-like sophont, the one individualized alien in the book, is told "there, there, old fellow" and patted on the neck. (The oppressed "animaloids" are all totally noble, unselfish, and peaceful, of course.) LIGHT is ostensibly about artists, but the novel's view of them is pure Hollywood; to Mr. Biggle artists apparently mean painters and painters mean nobody after the Impressionists. In LIGHT art dealers recognize masterpieces after "one brief look" (p. 14), some subjects are artistic and some aren't (p. 19), painters refer to each other as "X, the artist" instead of "X, the abstract-impressionist" (or whatever, p. 33), and paintings *become* masterpieces once they're officially recognized (p. 107). Part of the plot turns on the sudden conversion of dozens of hacks into real artists when they find new subject matter (i.e. scenes) to paint (p. 190). Not only has Mr. Biggle not invented a science-fiction version of painting; he does not seem to know or care about the last ninety years of Western painting. For example, there is a lot of talk about finding the best natural light to paint in—you would not know from the novel that most contemporary painters use artificial light.

There are women in the book, although the most important of them says "Posh!" and is called a "minx" and a "wanton." The men are just as bad. Mr. Biggle has an occasionally ghastly way with words: on p. 22 someone's memory "was still *replete* with what he had seen," on p. 45 someone else is "not certain *whom* the public might be," on the same page "it was the most unusual city they had ever seen, *but* it was also the most memorable," on p. 73 everyone is "enthused," on p. 122 "She loved to eat but. . .*despised* the lozenges that followed overindulgence." On p. 63 someone "pointed a finger *impalingly*" and on p. 66 someone is followed by "children. . . *mouthing* shrill taunts." (italics all mine) It is also a very small planet; the Head of the Secret Police finds things out by hanging around the spaceport and listening to the tourists talk (p. 92), apparently not having any staff who can do it for him.

It's narsty to beat up on authors who are probably starving to death on turnip soup (*ghoti* soup) but critics ought to be honest. Both books are juveniles, though not so labeled, both books are awful, and I wouldn't want any juvenile to read either of them.

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James Blish's MIDSUMMER CENTURY is like the old proverb: if we had some ham, we could make some ham and eggs, if we had some eggs. There is something strangely gratuitous about it. Mr. Blish's powers as a writer of single scenes are as keen as ever and CENTURY is crammed with ingenious ideas, but to my mind the book just doesn't cohere. It was Mr. Blish who invented the term "intensively recomplicated plot," and MIDSUMMER CENTURY has what is surely the most intensively recomplicated plot in existence; what's more, the plot turns are explained or rationalized after they happen, an unsettling procedure at best. I thought for a while there was too much material in the book (although a kind of epic, spanning many years, it is only 106 pages long); then I decided that the trouble lay in the point-of-view character, one Martels, a 20th-century scientist flung forward in time to the 250th century. He is vividly and economically characterized in the book's first 8 pages, but after that he might be anybody, or rather nobody, for he has not a single human reaction. (There is one emotional moment on p. 26 which is pure stereotype.) His character is quite irrelevant to his situation. He seems, in fact, to be irrelevant to the book except as a plot device; Mr. Blish's future tropical world of re-tribalized humanity, sentient Birds, a disembodied brain, and small colonies of scientifically oriented people living at the South Pole could get along much better without its twentieth-century visitor. (The book resembles Jack Vance's dying earth.) It might—without Martels—be possible to set up dramatic givens and then follow them. As the book stands now, there is no way to make dramatic sense of it—that is, the givens themselves are perpetually changing and in some places judgments seem to be made without any evidence. After a while it begins to seem as if *every* episode is being resolved arbitrarily, or at least each episode is resolved on the basis of knowledge neither reader nor protagonist possessed *until that moment.* Although CENTURY is not exactly self-contradictory, it might as well be.

I suspect that Mr. Blish has a coherent intellectual or thematic scheme for the novel (perhaps his subject is consciousness itself), but the dramatic conflict in the novel is quite disjunct from the thematic pattern. The world of the book is vivid and strange, but there is some flaw in construction that makes reading CENTURY genuinely exasperating—just when you think you've got

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hold of the puzzle, the author changes the terms on you. If only we could have plunged into the consciousness of some native of the world and then stayed there for four or five hundred pages—! As it is, Mr. Blish packs a full-scale Bird/Human war into four paragraphs, treats "juganity" and the Platonic model of consciousness as if he had explained them (which he hasn't), and wrenches his plot back and forth like a zigzag ride at a fun fair. Perhaps CENTURY is the first stab into new territory for Mr. Blish, a sketchy vision of something that may become an important new part of the Blishian canon. I remain confused.

Barry Malzberg's BEYOND APOLLO fulfills the promise of his earlier novel, THE FALLING ASTRONAUTS (Ace). The repetitiousness, the sloppiness, and the uncertainty of the earlier novel are all gone—though I miss the earlier book's assumption that not only the dehumanized astronauts but everyone in the program (and in the government) was insane. Again we have the protagonist's wife as the one human being who knows that something has gone wrong, again the false rational, "cool," bureaucratic-analytic tone of voice is hot with errors, and undermined by little mistakes ("committed sexual acts") which carry it easily and reasonably to the point of lunacy. The novel is lyrical, even circular, in structure, although it presents a straightforward, detective-story problem: How did the Venus flight fail? There is an answer, but the answer cannot be paraphrased. Words like "seriously," like "understand," like "believe," like "insane," are used seriously, are believed in, are insane, are understood—seriously—until they become a kind of Greek chorus, a terrible, poignant insistence on something that is not quite in the story but yet comes through the story. Reason is crazy, madness is sane. As the protagonist writes in his diary:

> The Captain. . .said that he had always had homosexual impulses and by God now he was going to act on them; *if you couldn't do what you wanted to do thirty million miles from earth, when were you going to get to do it?* (pp. 27-28, italics mine)

In his cell, meditating on What Went Wrong, doing cryptograms (he knows this is the only truly sane activity), Harry Evans—madman, failed astronaut—tells us over and over again How It Really Happened, a different story each time. APOLLO is the *cri du coeur* of the Galactic Amurrican Square who read PANDORA'S PLANET at fourteen and believed it

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would really be like that, a series of false perspectives, an exquisite tangle of self-deception. Only the protagonist's sexuality reminds him that he's human; yet sex itself has been deformed, has turned bodies into machinery, women into knives; it spills over and informs the most excessive, desperate metaphors of this astonishing book. There are veins of gold: "Her chin juts, reminding me of that other wedge of bone which rushed me in the night." Or:

> I am back in my bed, crawling out of the dream in small pieces, sweating and fussing, muttering to myself, or perhaps I am only clambering back into a dream, coming into my room in small sections, but in any event it is very complex and uncontrollable and I can make nothing of it. . . (p. 64)
>
> Doors slam up and down my wife's body; lights are extinguished. She pants; she groans. (p. 76)

Which is the real story—the almost Trafalmadorian Venusians who murdered the Captain and forced Evans to return? Or the mad Captain who kept Evans guessing the purpose of the trip to Venus, literally for weeks? Or the homosexual, murderous Captain? Or the man who simply couldn't stand it any more? The answer comes from reading the whole book, not from picking up separate clues as in a detective story. Still, the only way to read the whole book is to let oneself be taken in, to try and make sense of what doesn't make that kind of sense. As far as I can tell, there are only two straight-forward moments in the novel, both occurring paradoxically when the protagonist is farthest into his madness: the remarks the two Evanses make about themselves near the end ("They made a machine of me") and the altered meaning of the first paragraph of the novel, repeated at the end:

> I loved the Captain in my own way, although I knew that he was insane, the poor bastard. . .one must consider the conditions. The conditions were intolerable. (p. 3)

The Captain, of course, may be nothing more than Evans' alter ego, or an object in the madness that permeates this beautiful and heartbreaking book. There are horrid ironies, like Evans' pride in being so "highly qualified." There are gorgeous turns of phrase, bridge problems and cryptograms like "lovely small neurasthenic tentacles," "the little knifelike slant of his abused genitals. . .It is all for Venus."

Mr. Malzberg has been writing good books for some time. BEYOND APOLLO is a passionate, fine, completely realized work. The Galactic Square won't like it.

("The universe," writes Harry Evans on p. 112, "was invented by man in 1976 as a

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cheap and easy explanation for all of his difficulties in conquering it.".)

WHAT ENTROPY MEANS TO ME by George Alec Effinger is a promising first novel, a kind of camp epic in which the hero's Quest is invented—chapter by chapter—by his younger brother, while family squabbles rage as to what religious status the now-gone brother is to enjoy in the family pantheon. (The story has the air of games by which children transform their own back yards into Mars.) The family theology seems to recapitulate early Christian battles about the Trinity, with the addition here that the religion is a mythification of a family life which we actually see. Thus we have our (leucotomized) Mother whose perpetual tears are the source of the River of Life, the thrones (chairs) in the back yard, which belong to different principles (children) and so on. Some of this is fine, in particular the siblings' dealings with each other (they sign notes "Yours truly" even when the notes are threats on other siblings' lives) and the younger brother's literary throes (complicated by the family Conscience Monitor and the children's doctrinal wars). The parents, however, are very bald stereotypes and the scenes of the Quest are often vulgar without being funny or far too cheaply silly, e.g., phrases like "You're really weird" intruding into a bad satire of a love scene (p. 25). Mr. Effinger's book is uneven, despite the fine quantum jump of an ending, but parts are genuinely sweet and deceptively slight. At its best the story achieves a fine suffusion of emotion. I hope Mr. Effinger will go on to better things; the imagination and individuality are already there. The novel is dedicated to (among others) "my parents, for enabling me to write unfettered by the bonds of nonexistence."

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What happens when two single girls both find the Perfect Man; the only trouble is, he's the same man. Helen Gurley Brown might have an answer, but not the kind we care about, eh? Instead, consider Carol Carr's bright and offbeat solution. Mrs. Carr writes: "Born in Brooklyn, recently escaped to Bay Area; married to Terry Carr, beloved editor and man-about-town. Appeared in ORBIT 5 & 8, *Esquire* and *Epoch.* "

Wally A Deux

by CAROL CARR

BETH RUSHED INTO THE apartment at 9:00 in the morning, scarf flying, fringed bag swinging, hair streaming. Her teeth sparkled like the first snowfall after the sun comes out. Crackers met her at the door.

"Your depression's gone," she said. "Who is he?"

Beth slumped into a kitchen chair and laid her head on the table. She didn't answer. This was so out of character that Crackers immediately got worried; had Beth flipped, finally? Crackers was used to her roommate's frequent changes of mood, her highly labile personality (Crackers was an ardent Freudian), but the periods of mania had always lasted at least through the first few weeks of a new affair. She decided to play it cool.

"Do you want instant breakfast or yesterday's bagel?"

Beth lifted her head from the table and opened her tearful blue eyes. She gulped air.

"He's perfect," she said miserably.

"Perfect."

"Without a flaw."

"Good-looking?"

"Fantastic. Like that guy in the Sexodent commercial."

"Let's see. . .around forty-two?"

"Five. You know a callow youth wouldn't interest me." She smiled and dried her eyes. "What flavors do we have?"

Crackers got up and looked into one of the two kitchen cupboards. "Banana."

"Okay, but let's share it."

"I had the other bagel before you got in; it's all yours." She tore the corner of the packet, spilled the yellow powder into a glass, added milk and stirred. It smelled vile—like bananas. She put it in front of Beth.

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"Do we have a straw?"

"Just the bent glass one, from when you had your tonsils out."

"Never mind, it makes me feel like an invalid. Hey, remember Rachel's grandmother? She was so stingy that we started a rumor that she washed paper straws and used them over and over again."

"Right—and she always bought rotten fruit and didn't let anyone eat it so 'it should be in the house.' "

They both started to giggle. They were talking of when they were fifteen, ten years ago. Beth stopped laughing.

"I'll be twenty-six in three months."

"Yes, I know."

"Don't you think that's old?"

"It depends on how you mean it. You don't *look* old."

"How old do I look?"

"Oh, about. . . Hey, quit it." Crackers was the same age, but she had a chunky, timeless look.

"What's wrong with him, if he's perfect?"

Beth sipped the instant breakfast. "Nothing, there's nothing at all wrong with him. He's single, six four, owns his own plane, knows everything"—she took a breath—"he's funny, supersexy, understanding, paints *and* writes, has no living relatives—"

"My God, enough. Only one thing comes to mind: he's not desperately in love with you, right?"

"Wrong. He worships me."

"Too much?"

"No, just enough. I told you, he's perfect." She slid the banana drink towards Crackers. "Have some, it's horrible."

"I will if you tell me what's wrong."

Beth pushed her hair away from her face in a gesture of theatrical despair. "It's really impossible to explain. He wants to marry me and take me away to his *country estate*, for godsake, and you know how I've always loved the lady-of-the-manor thing. But he wants to do it right now. I've known him for two days and he's talking about blood tests. Why me? Okay, I'm gorgeous and intelligent and—"

"Spare me, Beth. Maybe it's very simple: he's forty-five and he's ready to take a lady into his manor."

"Crackers?" Beth looked tight and confused. "He's weird. I can't put my finger on it, but there's something about him that scares me."

Crackers put on her analyst's expression—a blank. "Think about it. Try to remember the specific moment when you felt scared."

Beth was a terrific analysand. It took only a second

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before she shuddered and said, "Well, for one thing, he sleeps with his eyes open."

They spent all of Friday night cleaning the apartment for Wallace Baxter's visit and all day Saturday shopping for his dinner. Crackers took a bus to Chinatown to get bean sprouts for the salad while Beth ransacked their friends' kitchens for pots, pans and platters. On the way home she stopped at the liquor store and asked them to deliver two wines and a half bottle of Corvoisier. Crackers picked up the crab meat, the duck, a package of wild rice, chocolate for the mousse, and Julia Child.

At 6:00 pm on Sunday Crackers told Beth that she was tired enough to go to sleep with *her* eyes open. When Beth didn't laugh, she apologized.

By 6:30 the ashtrays were all in place, the seafood cocktail in the refrigerator in seafood cocktail glasses, the duck in its juicy pan and the mousse in mousse cups. Beth was wearing an aquamarine silk jumpsuit, and Crackers had changed into a black wool dress with white collar and cuffs. She felt like the hired help.

Beth fluttered around the living room uselessly, humming "tripping hither, tripping thither" from *Iolanthe.* When the buzzer buzzed, she opened the door to Wallace Baxter, and they stood looking at each other in a wordless dialogue transmitted through their breathing. To Crackers he didn't look a bit like forty-five, or resemble the actor on the Sexodent commercial. In fact, he was young and blond, and quite perfect. When she took his hand in introduction, he held on to it for a fraction longer than was necessary. His eyes made her dizzy.

"Please, sit down." She gestured towards the edge of the couch near the dry-roasted peanuts. Beth was in the kitchen basting the duck. They'd planned that she would disappear with various excuses during the evening so that Crackers could have the equivalent of a full session with Wallace.

"Well," she said, and sat down next to him.

He smiled.

If this were a real session, Crackers thought, I could start by asking him about last night's dream. She closed her eyes for a second. If only they had more time—how she would love giving him a TAT.

"I dreamed last night that your real name was Samantha and we were on a plane together," he said. "You kept holding up cards for me to talk about."

She could hardly believe it; Beth must have told him she

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worked for a psychiatrist. "Go on," she said.

"Why are you called Crackers?"

"Why do you think?"

He looked directly into her eyes. "Because, as a child, you were the best walnut-cracker on the block. You did it with your teeth."

Crackers was shocked. Usually Beth spoke of no one but herself. She began to doubt the sincerity of her friend's passion for this man.

"That's right," she said. "What did you make of the pictures I was showing you?"

"Oh, they were just an ordinary set of TAT cards, and both of us could see right through the answers. I was deliberately giving you loaded material, and you were laughing because you knew that I knew that you knew, et cetera."

Crackers felt herself getting nostalgic for this scene that never was. She resented Beth now, not because the girl was model-beautiful, but because her beauty made her so confident. For instance, she'd been in the kitchen for ages, trusting Crackers with Wallace, counting on her lack of sex appeal. But there was more to attraction than a classic face and figure; she could teach this man everything there was to know about Freud. She had a short fantasy of their running away to Geneva and opening a clinic for disadvantaged schizophrenics. They would write endless journal articles, become the Frank and Eleanor Perry of psychiatry.

Beth came into the room and set down the crab meat cocktails. As she passed she gave Crackers a look that accused her of gold-bricking. Wallace excused himself and headed straight for the bathroom, almost as if he'd been here before.

"What are you doing?" Beth whispered as soon as he was out of earshot. "Crackers, for godsake, you look like you're in a trance."

Crackers moved a small fork two centimeters to the left. "You're right, Beth, so far everything you said is true—he's perfect. And yours," she added glumly.

"Of course he's mine"—Beth dismissed that statement with a wave of her hand. "But you were supposed to find out what's weird about him. Crackers? Remember?"

Crackers didn't answer. She was, literally, hopelessly in love. "You didn't tell me he knew about TATs."

"I told you he knew everything. Look, I'll do the dishes after we eat. It'll give you another chance. Okay?"

"Okay. Sure."

The duck was a little

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overdone, but nobody seemed to notice except Crackers. Beth and Wallace sighed and smiled at each other through all three courses, coffee and brandy. When they were finished, Beth gave him a lingering look, announced that she was going to do the dishes and declined his offer of help. He and Crackers moved over to the couch. Beth had put a record on, and June Christie was singing about someone dancing on her ceiling—"there's my love, up above. . . ." Crackers took firm hold of herself.

"Beth says you have a house upstate. Do you live in the city part of the time, Wallace?"

He lit a cigarette and crossed his leg at the knee. "Wally." He took her hand. When their eyes met, Crackers could have sworn she saw a thin line of electricity pass between them, with an accompanying crackle. She reminded herself that this was an affair of minds, not hearts or other organs. But when he kissed her, the distinction between her brain and glands clouded over. He took her in his arms and spoke softly of a clinic in Geneva. The water was running full blast in the kitchen, and she knew Beth couldn't overhear his betrayal of her, but the noise made her miss some of what he was saying. What she did hear was hard to believe. Before Beth came back into the room, Crackers had agreed to meet him sometime next week at his upstate estate, where his plane would fly them to Switzerland, there to set up house and shop.

When Beth walked in, Crackers couldn't look at her. She excused herself to the air with a plea of migraine and went to bed.

And lay there in the dark, imagining what excuse he could possibly give Beth for breaking off the relationship. She turned on the bedside lamp and reached for a book. She'd wait it out; she didn't want to be asleep when Wally left, to be woken up by Beth's hysterical accusations. She opened the book to a random page and stared at the word "unless." What was it Beth had said? "He sleeps with his eyes open." Ridiculous. He was perfect.

"Crackers dear," the note read. "I had an emergency call from the agency. Jenny Breen has chicken pox, isn't that delicious? *Vogue* planned a double-page color spread of body jewelry, only now it's my body instead of poxy Breen's. See you dinnertime. Hope your head's better. B."

Crackers felt a stab of pain in her left temple. He hadn't told her. Well, maybe it was the wrong time. Maybe they'd made a lunch date—so much

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more civilized in a crowded restaurant, over coffee. She took two nonaspirin headache pills (aspirin gave her a stomach ache before breakfast) and picked at the remains of last night's salad—one bean sprout, a leaf of spinach, another bean sprout. . . . Beth was definitely a labile personality. She'd accuse Crackers of disloyalty, slip into a depression, then go on a shopping spree to shake it. By the time Crackers and Wally were married, Beth would be safely in love with someone new. She made herself a cup of instant coffee and waited for it to cool. Could Beth be more disturbed than she'd thought? Saying that Wally slept with his eyes open was one thing—it could have been a trick of the light—but turning him into a father figure when he was obviously not much older than they were—now *that* was weird. She scalded her mouth with the first sip of coffee and simultaneously flashed on the image of the two of them at dinner—Wally gazing at Beth as though he wanted to devour her instead of the duck. They'd both cut up all the meat right away, then ate with only one arm above the table. Well, the hell with it. That was before he'd found Crackers. One had to separate the present from the past.

Crackers' mind wasn't on her job that Monday. She spent most of the morning reading Dr. Forbush's mail: psychoanalytic articles with titles like "Antigone: a Pre-Oedipal Old Maid" (Dr. Forbush was editor of the *Journal of the National Psychoanalytic Association*). She glanced through the *AMA Bulletin* and the *Medical Tribune* and lingered over photographs of diseased lung tissue, cancer survival statistics, the relation between blood sugar and early-morning homicides. She thought of Wally and how perfect he was and wondered if she'd given him her office number.

Dr. Forbush's first patient was half an hour early. That meant the doctor, when he arrived, would have to dash madly around the small foyer and into his office so that Mrs. Jacobs wouldn't see him in his role as a person coming to work. Many of his patients came early in order to pump Crackers about the doctor's private life. She didn't blame them for being curious—most of them had been with him for over five years—but she knew how destructive such information could be and managed to field the none-too-subtle questions.

"It's a beautiful day," Mrs. Jacobs said, leaning back into the yellow club chair. "Does the doctor have a long drive to the office?"

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"Oh, it depends on where he's coming from."

"He must be a very busy man. I don't suppose his wife gets to see very much of him."

Crackers waited for Mrs. Jacobs to try another direct question.

"Such a beautiful day. Has Mrs. Forbush been in recently? I noticed the new drapes."

"Oh, do you like them?"

Mrs. Jacobs sighed and shifted her pocketbook. "They're okay." She picked up a *New Yorker* just as the phone rang.

"Dr. John Forbush's office." (There was also a Dr. Max Forbush, a nephew.)

"Crackers? It's Beth." She sat up straighter. Wally must have broken the news.

"Crackers, listen hard because I may have to get off in the middle of a sentence. I'm at Wally's house in Poughkeepsie, 302 Cherry Lane Drive. Write it down."

"I thought you were modeling."

"No, I lied. It doesn't matter now. Either Wally is insane or I am—you've got to come up here. He's going to call you himself, later, but don't wait. Pretend you're sick and leave right now."

"Beth, I can't—he's got five more patients today. If I'm not here"—she lowered her voice to a whisper—"he'll have to show himself in the waiting room. That's out of context, Beth—it could be very damaging."

There was no reasoning with the girl. "Rent a car, the train's too slow. Crackers, he doesn't know what I saw, but I did—I *think* I did. You've got to tell me if I imagined it all."

"Take a Librium and we'll talk about it tonight."

"It won't wait till tonight. I need your reality testing, now."

"As a matter of fact," Crackers said for the benefit of Mrs. Jacobs, "I think I've got a fever. I may leave early."

When Crackers drove up to 302 Cherry Lane Drive, Beth was draped around a huge elm tree. She was wearing a white pants suit, and the sun glistened on her long blonde hair. "She's modeling despair," Crackers thought. But the second Beth saw her she ran to the car and burst into a cry resembling a new species of wild bird.

"He's in the study, trying to get you on the phone. He drove me here last night. We were supposed to get married. Then he told me he wanted to marry *both* of us. Then I saw his so-called plane in the woods back of the house. If that's an airplane, I'm Huntley and Brinkley."

She said all this through the open window of the driver's seat. Crackers started to get out

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of the car, but Beth stopped her.

"No—I'll get in. We may have to leave in a hurry."

Secretly Crackers suspected that Beth's symptoms had taken a paranoid turn, which was inconsistent with the manic-depressive syndrome. Would she have to revise her diagnosis?

"Beth, I thought you needed me for reality testing. How am I supposed to help you if the only reality I can test is the reality you tell me about? Let me get out of the car."

The girl looked at her disdainfully. "It was a means of transportation I wanted, not an amateur shrink. I'm sorry, Crackers—don't look so hurt."

There was a rustle of dry leaves, and both girls looked out the open window. Crackers saw Wally coming towards them, young and exuberant, his eyes sparkling with plans for the two of them. Beth was watching him too. "God, he's so convincing," she said. "He could have been the father I never had; I'd have kept him from turning old and jaded."

"Crackers, I was hoping it was you when I heard the car." Wally bent down to window level and kissed her long and passionately on the mouth. Visions of clinics danced in her head. Then she remembered her friend.

"Oh, Beth, I never wanted to take him away from you. But you can see how things stand."

"All I see is that Wally gave you a paternal peck, Crackers. If I were you, I'd start to wonder about my own reality testing. Anyway, I told you he wants both of us. Don't you, Wally?"

He smiled neutrally. "Why don't we all go to the house? I'll make us a drink and we'll talk."

"Crackers can't leave the car," Beth said quickly. "She has agoraphobia, don't you, Crackers?"

"No."

"And I'm staying here with her."

"You can stay here forever as far as I'm concerned." Crackers got out of the car despite Beth's restraining grip and muttered threats.

Beth slid over to the driver's seat, sobbing. She pushed down the lock and said in a brave new voice, "You're a fool, Crackers. He does sleep with his eyes open. And ask him about his plane and why it happens to have no wings and sits on a launching pad. While you're at it, ask him where he got the idea that he could marry both of us at once."

Only the last suggestion seemed to affect Wally. "You mean I can't?"

"You see? You see?" Beth

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screamed from the car. "He's either insane or—"

"Inexperienced," Wally finished. "Don't be too harsh. I had no idea that you two had feelings of jealousy."

"I'm *not* jealous," Crackers said. "How could I be jealous when you and Beth obviously have nothing in common; she hasn't got one thought she can call her own."

Beth got out of the car, her beautiful face an icy mask. "Bitch. What possible reason could I have for treating a frowzy frump like a rival? He feels sorry for you; that's why he fed you all that garbage about a clinic in Geneva."

"How do you know about Geneva?" Crackers' eyes filled with tears of betrayal.

"He told me, last night—in bed."

Wally put an arm around Crackers' shoulder. She pushed it off.

"Crackers, love, it wasn't garbage about the clinic. I can give you the clinic, and I can give you Geneva. I'll give you anything, both of you." He looked at them helplessly.

A squirrel ran up the trunk of a nearby tree. They all watched it until it disappeared into its hole.

When Beth spoke she was calmer.

"I think you should explain, Wally."

"All right. It's simple. I love you both, and I want you both to come home with me. Where I come from men exist to be and do whatever women want—we literally make your dreams come true."

"How?" Crackers asked. "Do you use hypnosis?" She was opposed to hypnosis, as she was opposed to drugs. "Do you have the power to cloud men's minds?"

"Only women's minds. Our men transmit, the women receive."

"That's disgusting," Beth said. She was into women's lib. "Anyway, what do you get out of it?"

He laughed. "When one can make many women happy at once, there's no reason not to have many women."

Beth looked at Crackers. "He says he can make us see what we want to see. What do you see?"

She couldn't share him with Beth, ever, under any circumstances. "I see a raving schizophrenic. What do you see?" Crackers kept her fingers crossed, hoping that Beth would go along with her.

"I see a filthy liar. But what about the spaceship, Crackers? It's small but it's no toy."

She thought for a second. "He's rich; he built it to support his delusion."

"Okay, I'll buy that."

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Both girls stood looking at the ground. Crackers wished there was some way she could avoid a farewell scene with Wally. She knew she would cry, and if she cried, there was no telling what Beth would do.

But for the moment Beth seemed to be in control. She took Wally's hand and pressed it to her cheek. "I know you're out of your mind," she told him, "but I don't expect I'll be able to stand it, never seeing you again."

He looked as miserable as she did. "Then change your mind. I swear you'll be happy."

"I couldn't. Where I come from only Mormons and hippies have more than one wife. I'm a manic-depressive middle-class human, and if I can't have all of you, this will have to be good-by."

Crackers wondered whether all models were latent actresses. But Beth's words must have been more effective than she'd thought, because Wally's mood changed so abruptly that he laughed out loud.

"Is that all you're worried about? Having all of me?"

"Yes. What do you mean, is that *all*?"

He didn't answer. "You too, Crackers? You wouldn't be happy sharing me with Beth?"

"I'd rather die." Although she felt like dying in any case.

"Well, then, ladies, we have no problem. Stand back a few feet and don't expect anything obvious."

They obeyed.

Where there had been the sound of birds and the wind on dry leaves, there was now silence. Where there had been the ordinary light of afternoon, there was now a yellow, almost electric glow enveloping them. Wally's features, then his body, blurred beyond recognition. Crackers blinked, and when she

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opened her eyes, Wally's figure had almost doubled in width.

Beth gasped.

"Shhh. Let him finish."

Wally was now occupying the space of two. The air around him shimmered, grew brighter, and Crackers could see two distinct forms with two different faces gradually solidifying in front of her.

"What kind of shape is your reality testing in?" Beth whispered.

"Not now!" One of the faces belonged to the Wally she knew. The other face was older, darker; it wore horn-rimmed glasses and looked vaguely familiar, although she was sure she'd never seen it before. It spoke Beth's name.

Somewhere up in a tree there was a flutter of wings, and the afternoon light turned ordinary again. But it was some time before Crackers realized what had happened, and even longer before she ran up to the man with the glasses and threw her arms around him, nearly knocking him off balance.

"Beth's father figure!" she cried. "I'd know you anywhere." Then she looked directly into the eyes of the man beside him. "Oh, Wally—you did it for us. You split your personality."

"So to speak," Wally said. "It seemed the thing to do."

As they walked into the woods, towards the spaceship, Beth drew close to Crackers.

"Now that you've seen him, what do you think?"

"What I've always thought. He's perfect."

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Here's a nice change of pace from Leo Kelley ("The True Believers," October 1971): a little country music with a science fictional twist.

Song

by LEO P. KELLEY

I CAN'T RIGHTLY SAY AS how I see the true connection between you studying to be a doctor, young feller, and you wanting me to help you along by singing you some of our old hill songs. No, sir, I should think you'd be a far bit better off if you took yourself to see Granny Larchmont down in the valley below and let her show you how to properly fix sassafras tea or make a cure-for-sure poultice out'n garden herbs.

What's that you say? You ain't planning on being the kind of doctor that hands out pills to people? You're planning on being a doctor of music? And that there's a recording machine you're acarrying around all set to snatch the songs people sing right out of their mouths before they're barely finished with 'em? Well, it takes all kinds, I suppose. Sure, I'll be pleased to oblige. You just sit yourself right down here on the porch—drag that old stool over here while I tune up this fiddle—it gets crotchety on days like this when rain's riding on the wind.

There now. You all set? That stool suit you? Good. Now here's a song about a girl with a head full of strong notions and a temper fiercer by far than any summer thunderstorm. Haven't sung it in a good long time. Brings back memories, it does. It goes—let's see now. It goes—

Sheba hitched up her

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buckboard—

Loaded in her one love and true.

She giddayapped to her horses

And off to Memphis they flew.

Good-by, Sheba. Good-by girl.

You betrayed him, your lover, your lonely old Earl.

Them last two lines, they be the chorus. Folks sing 'em in between the verses they keep making up about Sheba Mawdeen. Are there other verses? Why, you just bet there are. Lots of 'em. Let's see now. Oh, here's one that will tickle your tongue and make you want to join right in.

Earl, how he did love her.

Oh, Earl, how he loved that Sheba girl.

But off she ran with Dave Daniel,

Her young heart all awhirl.

Singing sure do make one thirsty on a day as hot as this, ain't that the truth now, young feller? I'll just uncork this here bottle Robert E. Lee Langtry dropped off a day or two back, and we'll have us a swallow or six. Now you just sit and settle down. Summer's long and a man's breath gets short when he gets to be as old as me. We got us plenty of time for singing. Here, you all hang on to the bottle and pleasure yourself for a bit.

What's that? You want to know where that there song come from? Why, it come from where every song in creation comes from. Right smack out of the heart of the one who made it up in the first place. In this particular case, right out of mine 'cause I'm the one who made it up though I never did get round to writing it down.

Was Sheba Mawdeen a real person? Now don't you for a minute doubt that she was. Sheba was as real as those cornstalks swaying in the field down there. She was a girl as real as today and as beautiful as tomorrow. She's been gone from these hills a real long time now. Let's see. She went—it was back in the summer of '92 and this here's—let me calculate a mite—

Right! This here's the early autumn of '31. Time sure passes fast. Still, I can remember the turn of the second century like it was yesterday—went all the way down to Memphis, me and May and the kids. To the centennial celebration, we took ourselves. We ate us fancy meals in restaurants with French names and slept in hotels where they changed the sheets almost every day and gave us free tickets to the Marshow in the new coliseum.

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Now, where was I? Oh, I remember. Well, sir, Sheba was just a smidgen over seventeen in that summer of '92, and she had herself shiny hair the color of new hay under the first light frost. Her eyes they were blue. No, green, I do believe. It's been a long time since I seen her. Some said she was part Cherokee going back aways on her great-granny's side. But then these here hills are as full of rumors as a coon dog is full of fleas. Sometimes you don't know what to believe. But you could believe just about anything about Sheba Mawdeen. She was a girl who could talk squirrels out of trees and men out of their minds. She was the one all the young bucks round about here was always after. They used to come prowling around her cabin at nights and following her down to draw water from the well in the mornings. She'd give them one of her don't-you-dare looks, and they'd just wander off to the Brown Bear Bar and Grill down in the valley and get themselves drunk as daredevils because Sheba had just tossed her hair in that wicked way of hers and walked right on, leaving them all far behind her and forgotten.

She used to say, "I'll know me my man when he comes riding right down out of the sky one day. He'll have spurs of pure silver and boots as bright as the new moon. He'll have evil eyes and pants as tight as tethering ropes."

She'd say things like that, and then she'd laugh, and all the young bucks between here and Sundaytown would fill up the Brown Bear Bar and Grill until all its walls buckled. There just weren't nothing much else for them to do, considering.

Well, when Sheba's man finally did come, he was a disappointment to most of the regular girls up here in the hills who'd been used to men with muscles and mouths alive with the kind of lies young girls do seem to dote on. His name, he told everybody the day he wandered up here into the hills like a kicked dog still on the lookout for flying feet, was Dave Daniel Marshall. I remember him well in his blue jeans and brown clodhoppers. I'll never forget my first sight of him. His jeans was having a time keeping his knees covered and his clodhoppers was so worn down at the heels he kept turning on his ankles every now and then. Fair he was with hair almost the same shy color as Sheba's. His face it was lean. In fact, his whole body had this here hungry look about it. Young feller, have you ever seen a hound the morning after it's been out all night on the howl? Well, that's exactly how

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he looked. He looked like he had either lost something awful important or maybe had never found it in the first place. Skinny as a snake he was, and when he'd start sweating from chopping wood, why, you'd of thought he was going to collapse under the weight of his own water.

Sheba was the first to find him one morning down by her well. She stood still as a sheep when it hears the wolf yelp off in the night somewheres. Couldn't move even an eyeball for a time, she said. She just stood and stared at this skinny stranger with the long thin fingers and the eyes that Sheba always said must have seen some mighty strange sights in their time to be all the time so sad looking.

"What be your name?" she finally asked him in a tiny voice that would have shamed a field mouse for certain.

"Dave Daniel Marshall, ma'am," he told her, reaching up to touch his hat, only he hadn't one on. "And you must be Titania."

That last remark of his threw Sheba for a few feet, she confessed. "No, I be Sheba Mawdeen," she said. "You must have me mixed up with somebody else. I live right up there in that runty old shack of a cabin. Alone," she tacked on, looking down at the wooden bucket that was tied to the rope he was holding in those fine piano-player hands of his.

"Sheba," he said. "I knew you looked like a queen the moment I saw you. I just mistook which queen you were. An absolutely unforgivable mistake. I beg your pardon."

"You talk like you're from somewhere besides these here hills," Sheba told him as he handed her the bucket and she dropped it down the well. "I ain't never seen the likes of you round here before."

"I'm from Philadelphia," he said.

Sheba nodded and said, "I spied you for a foreigner right off." She reached for the handle, but he was already cranking up the bucket for her. After she had filled her own pail, he walked on up to the cabin with her.

Sheba wanted to know what he was doing in the hills which hadn't seen a foreigner since the last time the tinker from Charleston come by.

"I'm on my way to see the world," was the way he put it.

There was something in the way he said it, Sheba always claimed, that made her think of faraway places with names she knew she'd never be able to make her tongue say straight. When she looked in his eyes, she said, she saw palaces and ladies with soft slippers on their

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feet and diamonds in their hair. For a time she thought maybe she was getting the fever because Dave Daniel Marshall looked as plain as a possum in his jeans and clodhoppers and she couldn't imagine him ever visiting palaces where ladies danced without hardly once touching the floor with their fancy feet. But there was his eyes and the way those eyes looked out at her—

Before the sun set that night, Dave Daniel had moved right in with Sheba. Her Ma and Pa was killed the year before in the avalanche of '91, and they never did have no other chicks 'cause Missus Mawdeen, she had something wrong with her innards and old Doc Emory shook his finger in her face after Sheba came squalling out of her and told her no more, not a single tad was she to ever go birthing again.

Well, didn't that old coon dog I told you about start his scratching after Sheba and Dave Daniel set up housekeeping! Only it was rumors that started flying off him, not fleas. The women down in the general store picked up their petticoats when Sheba came in and flounced off saying she weren't part Cherokee at all. Part hussy was what she was, and they'd known it all along. That wasn't all they said. But never mind about the rest. A young feller like yourself probably knows how it is with the other biddies in the barnyard when one hen catches the best rooster around.

Now Dave Daniel, to give the devil his due, he was a fine rooster even if he was so skinny and so pale. The words that came out of that man's mouth, and him no more than twenty-two or three years old tops, would have put our old circuit preacher to shame.

You'd see the two of them, him and Sheba, walking the hills in the morning just before first light. You'd spot them in the darkest part of the forest up yonder, and what they was doing there no decent jaybird would want to tell the world.

"What do you see in him?" Sheba's best friend, May, used to ask her. She's my wife now—May, I mean. Has been since the summer of '92 when Sheba and Dave Daniel left the hills for good.

"Cities with buildings of alabaster," Sheba told May. "Ships with wings instead of engines that sail through the seas between the stars."

"That there Dave Daniel's talk has given you a touch of spring fever, Sheba Mawdeen," was what May said to that. "You'd best take you a dose of salts and be about your rightful business."

But Sheba just laughed out loud for a long time, and when

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she was finished, she told May a secret.

Young feller, I'll tell you Sheba's secret that May run right out and told all the other hens clucking over the woolens and the feathered hats in the general store. It was a song as well as a secret, Sheba said. She called it her song, and she said Dave Daniel had taught it to her. Sheba sang her secret song for May.

His mouth is most sweet, yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

"That song must be about your one true love," May said, trying not to show how shocked she was at the bold words that Sheba claimed came straight out of the Bible. "You must be referring to Earl Aberswift, who has been courting you off and on for a whole year come this September."

Sheba looked down and then up again at May. "No, it's about my one true love, Dave Daniel Marshall. He that was a foreigner at first but is now my best beloved like it says in the song I just sung to you."

"Earl Aberswift's been following you two about and *listening*," May said. "He looks pinched around the lips and he mumbles to himself nowadays."

"Earl Aberswift," comes back Sheba, "don't wash hisself more'n once a month, if that. Besides which, he only wants a mare to ride when he feels that manly bucking between his legs. He don't know no nice words or have an ounce of kindly sentiment in him anywheres at all. He don't know how to listen to a girl when she tries to tell him how she feels so lost sometimes but the right words won't come to her."

Well, sir. Sheba and Dave Daniel they took these hills for their very own and paid no mind a-tall to the words that were being said about them by the ladies of the Sunday School Society. Earl Aberswift sulked about in the Brown Bear, and then he'd go out roaming the hills. Everybody knew what he was looking for, and when he found them, back he'd go to the Brown Bear, and it took him a whole month's wages from the sawmill to pay for all the bottles and furniture he broke while he kept bellowing about it not being a bit fair for Sheba Mawdeen to let him come courting when the mood took him and then to change her mind so fast and sure over a stranger even if that stranger did know Bible words that could turn a girl's head and topsy-turvy her heart.

It might not have happened to her if Sheba hadn't been so alone for so long. See, she was a girl who kept to herself a lot.

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She was a girl who always seemed to be seeing something that other people didn't even suspect existed. Her Pa had taught school for a spell, and some say it was him who ruined her for getting on good with ordinary people. Me, personally, I think it was her Ma who up and confused her by always telling her tales about places and people who were no more real than the bogyman we talk about in order to get the tads into bed at night and keep 'em there.

Anyway, it all almost ended the night Sheba caught Dave Daniel down by the creek with May. He said he was just helping May across the creek because one of the stepping stones had been washed away in the spring flood, and May admitted later that what he said was true for sure. But Sheba said he didn't need to help May so much that he ended up getting her pink powder all over his ears. May said she had no idea in the whole wide world what Sheba was taking on so about. She thanked Dave Daniel most politely and then went on about her business without looking back at him but twice.

Sheba picked up a big stick. Dave Daniel ducked so she only landed it on his shoulders. She said he was as faithful as a tomcat and as trustworthy as a chicken hawk, and she allowed as how she never had trusted foreigners before and never would again, not ever.

Dave Daniel finally caught up with her by the waterfall north of Sundaytown even though she had run from him faster than a jack rabbit with a burr in its tail.

He said, "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?"

May, when Sheba told her later what he'd said, claimed she didn't understand anything but the last part. She knew Sheba had herself a terrible temper, she said. She guessed that was what Dave Daniel meant about her being terrible as an army with banners. May remembered the time Sheba had clouted Deacon Braithwaite with a wooden potato masher the time he'd claimed he wanted to test her virtue out in the smokehouse. Sheba, like I said before, had some real strong notions and nobody was going to deny her notions once she settled in on 'em.

That's why it came as no surprise a-tall to anyone when, after Dave Daniel took so sick so sudden, she did what she did. It was just Sheba's way.

Yeah, he got sick with the cancer. There just wasn't no hope for him, not with the way his insides was being eaten up

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and him getting thinner and paler and not being able to hold even an egg poached on a low fire in his stomach.

Soon's he knew he was fixing to die, Dave Daniel dragged himself out of Sheba's cabin and got some of the folks hereabouts to build him a shelter down by the waterfall. It weren't all that much better than a lean-to, but he said he didn't need more, seeing as how what was going to happen to him wouldn't be worsened by wind nor quickened much by rain.

Sheba cried and carried on. Folks said you could hear her wailing all the way up on the top of Hollyberry Hill. But Dave Daniel wouldn't let her come near him. He yelled at her to go away and find herself somebody else. It was the cancer that had turned his heart to ice, I always figured. Anyway, he took to throwing stones at her the minute she'd come into sight, wringing her hands and crying out to him to let her at least stay by his side until it happened.

But a woman like Sheba, a woman with such strong notions, she couldn't take forever to come to her senses. It happened a week after Dave Daniel took so sick. Sheba up and turned her back on him like he said he wanted her to do. She propped up the mirror in her cabin, and she took a hot curling iron and she frizzed up her hair that Dave Daniel had always liked straight and natural, and off she went to the general store. When she didn't find Earl Aberswift stuck to the top of any of the cracker barrels in there with his cronies, why, she just sashayed over to the Brown Bear and walked right in and put her hand on his shoulder so soft that he lost the poker game he'd been playing. But he didn't care.

Earl was happy at first until he found out what Sheba was really up to. When he did find out, he told her he wouldn't take no part in such shenanigans, being a decent man even if he did take a glass or two too many now and then.

So when Sheba found out that Earl wasn't going to help her, she did by herself what we still sing about in these parts. She hitched up her buckboard, and she went down to the waterfall, and she ducked the sticks and stones Dave Daniel flung at her, and she hauled him up into her buckboard with him all the time crying like a baby same as Sheba herself, and then she giddayapped to her horses, and off they flew to Memphis.

When she finally came back, she was alone.

May right away asked her what she'd gone and done with Dave Daniel.

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"I sent him away," Sheba said. "I'd just heard all about how those scientists had found themselves a way to send people into the future where they'd found out there was other scientists who'd figured out how to cure sicknesses that we couldn't—not here and now, not yet."

Now you got to understand that May is sometimes a mite snooty. So she said to Sheba, "So that's what you did to your one true love! You sent him away all by himself!"

Sheba gave her one of those looks of hers, and May said she thought she was going to melt right there in the middle of the road, so hot was that look of Sheba's. She said it was the look of somebody who's got a strong notion and plans on putting that notion into action.

The next thing anybody knew about Sheba was the waterfall. Standing in it without a stitch on she was one night, shivering and shaking and, some said, crying her eyes out, only that may just have been a mistake 'cause her face was already so full of water from the fall, you really couldn't say for certain.

Addled she was, folks said, on account of losing her Dave Daniel. "Sheba Mawdeen's brains is frozen stiff from standing naked near all night in that cold waterfall," folks said to each other and shook their heads over the ways of such women. They said, "She ought to go on back to Earl Aberswift, that's just what she ought to do, and forget all about her trouble by the name of Dave Daniel Marshall. A bird in the hand's worth two in the bush. What's done is done, and the Lord moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform."

But Sheba had her own wonders to perform in her own way, as it turned out later. She didn't have no time for Earl Aberswift, who had refused to help her in her trouble, although heaven knows he had his good reasons why he just couldn't. He'd haul hisself out of the Brown Bear now and then, and folks claimed you could hear him tearing through the timber near Sheba's cabin with the likker jouncing around inside him like balls of fire while he bellered for her to let him come in to talk to her just once, he had something important to say out loud to her. But she wouldn't let him in. She did call out to him once though to stay away from the waterfall, which she had taken to visiting every single night. She didn't want him peeping at her in her misery, was what she said.

May brought Sheba a jar of elderberry preserves one day not much later. She found her hitching up her buckboard and

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sneezing up a storm, which was no wonder a-tall since she'd been chilled half to death by that old waterfall. She was sucking on Doctor Ketchum's Thin Throat Lozenges for her sore throat, May said. And she was shaking so with chilblains and blazing so with fever that the buckboard rattled and near burned up from her touch as she made it ready for her journey.

"Where you going?" May asked her.

"To Dave Daniel," Sheba said. "I'm going to join my one true love," she told May. And off she went with the harness rattling and her horses snorting fit to bust. And that was the last any of us hill people round here ever saw of Sheba.

Yep, the last. But we read all about her later in the paper. They wrote her up good and proper way down there in Memphis. Even had her picture right there on the front page, swollen nose and runny eyes and all.

The scientists wouldn't listen to her at first. They tried to throw her out of the medical center where the machine or whatever it was that went to the future was, but she threw them a proper fit, and they gave in at last and listened to her notion.

It told all about it in the paper.

Sheba said to them scientists, "I've got me a summer cold. Can you cure it?"

"No," the scientists said.

"Then do you know anybody as can?"

At first, they didn't catch on to her strong notion, but then they did. Seems like they had found a cure for the common cold in the same year off in the future as the one where they found a cure for cancer.

Well, the scientists tried to argue Sheba out of going on her planned trip because she could go only one way—forward, they told her. The machine, or whatever it was, couldn't be put in reverse, they shouted at her. Her cold, they yelled at her, would cure itself in seven days or so. Nobody in their right mind, those scientists screamed at her, wanted to go all alone into all the tomorrows to come just on account of a silly summer cold.

"I'm *not* in my right mind!" Sheba shouted back at them. "Because I'm all the way in love with Dave Daniel Marshall. I got me nobody else anywheres except Earl Aberswift, who only wants a girl, not *me!* I ain't even got Dave Daniel any more because of the Lord's mysterious ways, and now I'd be most obliged if we could stop all this here palavering. Please show me the way to the machine you fellas got."

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And that's about all there is to it except for the song I sung part of before. Oh, wait. There is one more thing. Sheba, before she left Memphis and the summer of '92, wrote a long letter back to May and told her all about what the scientists had said but how she'd held on tight on her strong notion. At the end of her letter, she sort of explained about the waterfall and other things too, I guess, because what she wrote was:

By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth.

Now then, young feller, if you'll just pass that there bottle back over this way, in a minute I'll sing you another verse or two about Sheba Mawdeen and how she stood in that cold waterfall on purpose just so she could catch cold and go about the streets of a city none of us now alive will ever see in order to be with her one true love, her Dave Daniel Marshall.

Ah, that's good drinking whiskey! Robert E. Lee Langtry's whiskey even beats buttermilk with a dash of molasses dropped in it. What? You want to know my name so's you can put it in that there book you're writing while you're on your way to becoming a doctor of music?

Why, my name's Earl. Earl Aberswift.

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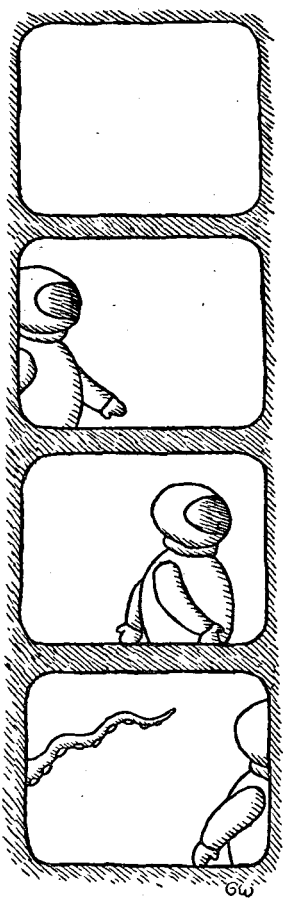
HORRORS!

THIS MONTH I SEEM TO have been up to my 'ips in 'orrors, on both the big screen and the little. Nothing really great, mind you (except one classic), but several things of interest.

There's **Vampire Circus**, for instance. It's not exactly the standard brew—which doesn't necessarily make it better, of course. This little village in Serbia has a Count who happens to be a vampire. He does in the local children with the help of a pretty village *frau*, who seems to get her kicks from watching. The villagers do *him* in, but he promises to return, wooden stake or no wooden stake. Fifteen years later, the village is struck by a mysterious plague and isolated by its neighbors. Somehow a small traveling circus gets through. Shades of Dr. Lao, it has a were-panther, not to mention a gypsy woman, a pair of acrobats, and the usual sinister dwarf. Things really start going to pieces in Schtettel now; it seems that the circus folk are friends and relatives of the late Count, set on revenge and revival. They start in on the current generation of children by way of a magic mirror into which they are lured, though some of the circus folk have no visible reflections in it. . .

BAIRD SEARLES

FILMS



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As you can see, most of these are not the usual ingredients. While the dialogue and acting are about standard, there are also some nice moments of staging. The twin acrobats (who are vampires, children of the Count by the gypsy woman who is really his local paramour of old) trap their half sister in a school room and have a playfully sinister game of cat and mouse with her. When children peek into the panther's cage, there is a fast, almost subliminal flash of a young man lying there with a golden chain around his neck. The whole thing ends with more bodies lying around than *Hamlet*, some sort of record, I'm sure.

On the same bill in my nabes was **Countess Dracula**, a real loser. The lady in question is not even a genuine vampire, but just an aged Hungarian Countess (why aren't Dukes or Earls ever involved in these things, by the way?) who fortuitously discovers that the blood of a young virgin will renew her youth (there is no explanation whatsoever as to why this unlikely formula will succeed where Elizabeth Arden has failed). When she gets a bathtub full, she turns into a busomy bleached blonde who looks as if she had been left out in the streets too long. It's all predictable from there, given a dashing young hussar and her daughter who's been away at school.

Dracula A.D. 1972 features the unsurprising team of Christopher Lee as Dracula and Peter Cushing as Prof. van Helsing ("Cushing's back and Lee has got him" to paraphrase a famous ad campaign). This is not *the* van Helsing, but his grandson, but it is *the* Dracula; the premise of the film is that a True Believer gets a bunch of thrill-seeking London adolescents together for a Dracula-raising ceremony, which works. As usual, the mad, mod teen-agers (who all look about 30) are about 5 years behind the times ("Dig the music!" screams their leader), about as hip as the Partridge family and half as decadent. It ends with the customary battle in a ruined church between the principals over the nightie-clad granddaughter of van H. I'm afraid the horror film, with some exceptions, has reached the formula ridden state that the genre had come to in the '40s,i.e. they're literally making the same movie over and over again.

Late, late show department . . .More horrors. I had never seen Corman's *House of Usher* (1960), and now that I have, I can see why it has its good reputation. It is remarkably

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restrained, true to the original (the main problem seems to have been stretching the material to feature length without adding major extraneous elements), and very handsome. The color work is almost entirely in blues, grays and blacks; I can't remember a single warm or bright color save for the flames at the end. Vincent Price had not yet been goaded into excesses and is damn good as the Usher scion who is so sensitive that he can't bear the sound of a shod footstep in another room. My only real reservation is the final collapse of the house; the budget just wasn't big enough to bring it off, a real shame considering the rest of the film.

I'd forgotten what *The Haunted Palace* (1963) really was, as well as being misled by the Poe title and the Poe-try read on the sound track. But when we found ourselves (and Vincent Price) in Arkham, Mass., I began to recognize our Lovecrafty friend, Charles Dexter Ward. Though considerably watered down, it still keeps HPL's original idea of the descendent possessed by his warlock ancestor. Price is again very good, and the Necronomicon is treated here with respect, as opposed to the *Dunwich Horror* film when it was propped in Sandra Dee's crotch.

I had always considered *The Thing (From Another World)* (1951) a horror film. In fact, to my mind it was the original stimulus for the '50s cycle of science/horror films that eventually degenerated into Godzilla & Co. On seeing it again some years ago I was struck by what a good *movie* it was. The dialogue is admirably written and directed; it is, in fact, a model of realistic direction, with lines overlapping and sometimes inaudible as in a recorded conversation. The characters are likeable and human (save for the title role, of course), and the obligatory romance is lightly played. On seeing it yet again this month, all this was verified and yet another aspect of the film struck me. It is not a horror film at all, not even a hybrid one. It would take an essay to particularize the differences, but it simply has none of the style of a horror film—no red herrings, fake builds, scariness for its own sake. It is *absolutely* straightforward, and, paradoxically, that quality plus the *verismo* style makes it all the more terrifying. But it is still a science fiction film in which the alien happens to be malevolent (as in the original story), and so far as I'm concerned from seeing it several times, it is one of the best s-f films ever made.

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A short chiller from a young Clarion Workshop writer who tells us that she "was born in 1952 in Houston, which is my home. I'm a journalism major at Syracuse University. I haven't done a list of diverse and wonderful things like truck driving, buffalo herding etc. but I haven't been around that terribly long yet." Well, okay. This is Miss Tuttle's second published story; her first, "Stranger in the House," appeared in CLARION II.

Dollburger

by LISA TUTTLE

WHEN SHE LISTENED hard, Karen thought she could hear the men downstairs searching for dolls. Although she didn't know what they looked like, she thought of them as hairy troll-like men with the large square teeth of horses. She glanced at the attic door. All her dolls were safe in there. Surely the men would never come upstairs into her room.

The thought made her clutch the blankets to her chin, her body rigid with the effort of not breathing. The bed was safe, it had always been a sanctuary, but she didn't know the powers or limits of these doll thieves and could only guess at protection. She'd learned about them just that morning, from her father.

"Daddy, have you seen Kristina?"

"Let daddy read his paper, sweetie—he doesn't know which doll Kristina is," her mother said, flipping pancakes.

Daddy dipped a piece of toast in his coffee and looked at it thoughtfully before biting. He replied with his mouth full.

"Did you leave her downstairs?"

"Yeah—I think."

Daddy shook his head. "Shouldn't have done that. Dangerous. Don't you know what happens to dolls that get left downstairs all night?"

Karen glanced quickly at her mother. Catching the half smile on her mother's face, Karen raised her eyebrows skeptically.

"No," she said, in a tone that dared him.

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Daddy shook his head again and consumed the last of the piece of toast.

"Well, if you leave your doll downstairs, you can just expect that when those men come looking—"

"What men?"

He looked surprised that she should need to ask. "Why, the men who eat dollburgers, of course!"

"Dollburgers?"

"Just like hamburgers. Only, of course, made out of dolls."

"No."

"No?"

"People don't eat dolls, and dollburgers are just tiny hamburgers, like what mommy made on my last birthday, which you feed to dolls."

"But dolls don't eat—people do."

"You *pretend*," Karen said, exasperated with him. He was shaking his head.

"I don't care what you call little hamburgers—but I happen to know about dollburgers. People eat them, and they're made out of dolls. There are people who just love them. Of course, they're illegal; so they have to sneak around, looking for houses where little girls have forgotten to put their dolls safely away. When they find abandoned dolls, they pop them into a sack until they collect enough to grind up into dollburgers."

"That's a story," Karen said.

Her father shrugged. "I'm just trying to warn you so when you lose a doll you'll know what's happened to it and maybe you'll be more careful in the future."

Her mother came to the table. "No dollburgers in *this* house. Pancakes, though. Karen, get your plate if you want some."

Karen suddenly remembered where she'd left Kristina. Of course—last night before she went to bed, she and Kristina had been lost in the wilderness and had crawled into a cave to rest for the night—Kristina must still be in the cave.

"In a minute," she said, and went purposefully into the living room.

The bridge table was the cave, but there was no doll underneath. Karen dropped to her hands and knees. Kristina was gone. Something gleamed in the corner by a table leg, and she picked it up.

A blue eye gazed impassively up from her hand. There were some shards of pink plastic on the carpet. Kristina?

"Karen, do you want pancakes or don't you?"

"In a minute," she called, and carefully picked up each tiny piece and put it in her pocket. She looked at the eye again. Kristina's eyes were blue. She put the eye in her pocket.

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"Daddy," she asked over pancakes, "do the people—the people who eat dollburgers—do they ever just, you know, eat dolls? I mean, right where they find them?"

Her father considered. "I suppose sometimes they get so hungry that they might just crunch up a doll right there, with their teeth," he said. "You never know what they'll do."

"I'm sure Kristina is perfectly safe," said her mother. "I'll help you find her after I do the dishes."

After breakfast Karen went up to her room and examined the eye and the pieces of pink plastic, the last remains of Kristina. What daddy had said about the dollburger eaters was real, then, and not just a story like the grizzly bear in the cedar closet.

Karen had the attic room. Her closet was actually the attic itself—without wallpaper, beams bare overhead and decorated with bits of discarded furniture and boxes of old clothes. She kept her toys there, and it was home to all her dolls. She took Kristina's eye there, climbed onto a rickety chair and put it in a secret place atop a ceiling beam. It would do better than a funeral, she thought, since there was so little of poor Kristina left.

The dolls watched her steadily from their places. Karen looked around at all of them from her position atop the chair, feeling queen of all she surveyed, giant queen-mother to all these plastic, rag and rubber babies.

Hard-faced Barbie sat stonily beside doltish Ken in front of their dreamhouse. Her clothes spilled out of the upstairs bedroom; two nude teenagers (Barbie's friends) sprawled in the kitchen.

The bride doll sat next to Princess Katherine where she'd sat for months undisturbed. There was dust in her hair, and the shoulders of her white gown looked grimy. Princess Katherine's crown was bent, her green dress stained, and her lower right leg secured to the upper leg with Band-Aids and masking tape.

Raggedy Ann, Raggedy Andy, Aunt Jemima and Teddybear slouched together in the rocking chair. The talking dolls, Elizabeth, Jane and Tina, sat grimly silent. The babydolls had been tossed into one crib where they lay like lumps. Susan, bald and legless, had been wrapped tenderly and put in the blue plastic bassinet.

Karen looked at the top of the old dresser, where Kristina used to sit with Beverly. Now Beverly sat there alone. Karen felt tears in her eyes: Kristina had been her favorite. She

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suddenly felt uncomfortable standing above her dolls, felt that they were blaming her for Kristina's disappearance.

She felt guilt, a heaviness in her stomach, and thought she saw grim indictment on the still, staring faces.

"Poor Kristina," she said. "If only someone had warned me." She stepped down from her perch, shaking her head sadly. "If only daddy had told me before—then I could have protected her. When I think of all the times I've left some of you out—well, now that I know I'll be sure to take good care."

She looked around at all the dolls, who had not changed expression, and suddenly the silence of the attic became oppressive.

Louisa, Karen's best friend, called that afternoon. "Would you and Kristina care to join me and Isabella in having a tea party?" she asked in her best society-lady voice.

Karen assumed a similar voice to reply. "Oh, my deah, I would love to, but Kristina has been kidnaped."

"Oh, how dreadful, my deah."

"Yes, it is, my deah, but I think I shall bring my other child, Elizabeth."

"Very good, I shall see you in a few minutes. Ta-ta."

"Ta-ta, my deah."

Elizabeth was one of the talking dolls, always her favorite until golden-haired Kristina had come as a birthday gift.

Louisa's little sister Anne and her ragdoll Sallylou were the other guests at the tea party, treated with faint disdain by Louisa and Karen for their lack of society manners.

"Why don't you let Elizabeth eat her own cookie?" Anne demanded as Karen took a dainty bite. Elizabeth had politely refused the cookie.

"Be quiet, silly," Louisa said, forgetting her role. "Dolls don't eat cookies."

"Yes, they do."

"No, they don't."

"Uh-huh."

"They do not."

"Well, if they don't, then what *do* they eat?"

"Nothing."

"Pretend food," Karen amended. "They have to eat pretend food because they only have pretend teeth and pretend stomachs."

Anne shook her head. "Sallylou has *real* teeth, and so she has to eat real food."

"Oh, she does not," Louisa said. "All you do is mash cookie in her face so she gets crumbs all over. Show me her teeth if she has them."

"I can't, 'cause her mouth is closed," Anne said smugly.

"You're just stupid."

Later, when they were alone,

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Karen told Louisa what had happened to Kristina and watched her friend's eyes grow wider. This was no story; it was real and immediate, and the proof was the blue eye now lying on a bed of dust and staring unceasingly at the attic roof.

Karen's ears ached from trying to hear movement downstairs. She always lay awake at the top of the house, feeling silence and sleep wrap the house from the bottom up until it finally reached her and she slept. But now every distant creak of board, every burp of pipe, made her tense and listen harder. She'd left no dolls downstairs, of course, but what if those men should not be deterred by stairs but were lured on by the scent of dolls up in the attic?

She thought of Louisa across the street and wondered if she too lay awake listening. Louisa, she knew, had put all her dolls under the bed, the safest place she could think of.

Karen suddenly thought of her own dolls, more frightened than she, sitting terrified in the dark attic, listening to the sounds as she did and wondering if the next creaking board would bring a dark sack over their heads, labeling them dollburger meat. It was her duty to protect them.

She went on bare feet to the attic door, the full moon through her window giving her light enough to find her way. She opened the attic door and thought as she did so that she heard a movement inside, as if perhaps a doll had been knocked over.

She had to go inside the attic several feet to reach the light cord. Her bare foot nudged something as she did, and when the light came on, she looked down to see what it was.

Poor, bald, legless Susan lay naked on the floor, and Karen noticed at once that Susan now was not only legless, but armless as well. When she picked her up, small shards of pink plastic fell from the arm sockets.

Karen felt an almost paralyzing fear. They were up here, somehow in the attic without having come past her bed, and already they'd begun on her most helpless doll. Holding Susan to her, she began to gather all the other dolls into her arms. She lifted the skirt of her nightgown to make a bag and tumbled the dolls in there. They were scattered around as if they'd been thrown, none in their right places. Barbie on the floor, Ken in the rocking chair with Raggedy Andy and the bride. Every time she bent to pick up another doll, she was sure she could hear the muffled

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breathing of the hungry dollburger eaters and feel the pressure of their eyes against her back.

She began to pray, whispering and thinking, "Oh, please, please, please, oh, please."

Finally she had all the dolls together, and she stumbled to the door and closed it, leaving the light still burning in the attic. For safety she pushed her chair in front of the door.

Then she went to bed, arranging all the dolls around her, lying down, falling asleep sandwiched by their small hard bodies.

She may have dreamed, but she never woke as they began to move closer to her in the night, and she didn't see the crumbs of plastic that fell from Elizabeth's open, hungry mouth.

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In this new novelet, Robert Aickman brings his graceful and elegant approach to one of the classic themes in supernatural horror fiction. We introduced Mr. Aickman to F&SF readers (and to most U.S. readers, since he had been published primarily in England) with "The School Friend," December 1970. Since then we've offered first U.S. publication of more of his British stories, but we're pleased to note that this brand new story is being published here for the first time anywhere.

Pages from a Young Girl's Journal

by ROBERT AICKMAN

3rd October. Padua—Ferrara—Ravenna. We've reached Ravenna only four days after leaving that horrid Venice. And all in a hired carriage! I feel sore and badly bitten too. It was the same yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that. I wish I had someone to talk to. This evening, Mamma did not appear for dinner at all. Papa just sat there saying nothing and looking at least two hundred years old instead of only one hundred, as he usually does. I wonder how old he *really* is? But it's no good wondering. We shall never know, or at least I shan't. I often think Mamma *does* know, or very nearly. I wish Mamma were someone I could talk to, like Caroline's Mamma. I often used to think that Caroline and her Mamma were more like sisters together, though of course I could never say such a thing. But then Caroline is pretty and gay, whereas I am pale and quiet. When I came up here to my room after dinner, I just sat in front of the long glass and stared and stared. I must have done it for half an hour or perhaps an hour. I only rose to my feet when it had become quite dark outside.

I don't like my room. It's much too big and there are only two wooden chairs, painted in greeny-blue with gold lines, or once painted like that. I hate having to lie on my bed when I should prefer to sit, and

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everyone knows how bad it is for the back. Besides, this bed, though it's enormous, seems to be as hard as when the earth's dried up in Summer. Not that the earth's like that here. Far from it. The rain has never stopped since we left Venice. Never once. Quite unlike what Miss Gisborne said before we set out from my dear, dear Derbyshire. This bed really is *huge*. It would take at least eight people my size. I don't like to think about it. I've just remembered: it's the third of the month so that we've been gone exactly half a year. What a lot of places I have been to in that time—or been through! Already I've quite forgotten some of them. I never properly saw them in any case. Papa has his own ideas, and one thing I'm sure of is that they are quite unlike other people's ideas. To me the whole of Padua is just a man on a horse—stone or bronze, I suppose, but I don't even know which. The whole of Ferrara is a huge palace—castle—fortress that simply frightened me, so that I didn't *want* to look. It was as big as this bed—in its own way, of course. And those were two large, famous towns I have visited this very week. Let alone where I was perhaps two months ago! What a farce! as Caroline's Mamma always says. I wish she were here now and Caroline too. No one has ever hugged and kissed me and made things happy as they do.

The Contessa has at least provided me with no fewer than twelve candles. I found them in one of the drawers. I suppose there's nothing else to do but read—except perhaps to say one's prayers. Unfortunately, I finished all the books I brought with me long ago, and it's so difficult to buy any new ones, especially in English. However, I managed to purchase two very long ones by Mrs. Radcliffe before we left Venice. Unfortunately, though there are twelve candles, there are only two candlesticks, both broken, like everything else. Two candles *should* be enough, but all they seem to do is make the room look even larger and darker. Perhaps they are not-very-good foreign candles. I noticed that they seemed very dirty and discolored in the drawer. In fact, one of them looked quite black. That one must have lain in the drawer a very long time. By the way, there is a framework hanging from the ceiling in the middle of the room. I cannot truthfully describe it as a chandelier: perhaps as a ghost of a chandelier. In any case, it is a long way from even the foot of the bed. They do have the most enormous rooms in these foreign houses where we stay.

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Just as if it were very warm the whole time, which it certainly is not. What a farce!

As a matter of fact, I'm feeling quite cold at this moment, even though I'm wearing my dark-green woolen dress that in Derbyshire saw me through the whole of last winter. I wonder if I should be any warmer *in* bed? It is something I can never make up my mind about. Miss Gisborne always calls me "such a chilly mortal." I see I have used the present tense. I wonder if that is appropriate in the case of Miss Gisborne? Shall I ever see Miss Gisborne again? I mean in *this* life, of course.

Now that six days have passed since I have made an entry in this journal, I find that I am putting down *everything*, as I always do once I made a start. It is almost as if nothing horrid could happen to me as long as I keep on writing. That is simply silly, but I sometimes wonder whether the silliest things are not often the truest.

I write down words on the page, but what do I say? Before we started, everyone told me that, whatever else I did, I *must* keep a journal, a travel journal. I do not think this is a travel journal at all. I find that when I am traveling with Papa and Mamma, I seem hardly to look at the outside world. Either we are lumbering along, with Papa and Mamma naturally in the places from which something can be seen, or at least from which things can be best seen; or I find that I am alone in some great vault of a bedroom for hours and hours and hours, usually quite unable to go to sleep, sometimes for the whole night. I should see so much more if I could sometimes walk about the different cities on my own—naturally, I do not mean at night. I wish that were possible. Sometimes I really hate being a girl. Even Papa cannot hate my being a girl more than I do sometimes.

And when there *is* something to put down, it always seems to be the same thing! For example, here we are in still another of these households to which Papa always seems to have an entree. Plainly it is very wicked of me, but I sometimes wonder *why* so many people should want to know Papa, who is usually so silent and disagreeable, and always so old! Perhaps the answer is simple enough: it is that they never meet him—or Mamma—or me. We drive up, Papa gives us all over to the major-domo or someone, and the family never sets eyes on us, because the family is never at home. These foreign families seem to have terribly many houses and always to be living in another of them. And when one of the

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family *does* appear, he or she usually seems to be almost as old as Papa and hardly able to speak a word of English. I think I have a pretty voice, though it's difficult to be quite sure, but I deeply wish I had worked harder at learning foreign languages. At least—the trouble is that Miss Gisborne is so bad at teaching them. I must say *that* in my own defense, but it doesn't help much now. I wonder how Miss Gisborne would be faring if she were in this room with me? Not much better than I am, if you ask me.

I have forgotten to say, though, that this is one of the times when we *are* supposed to be meeting the precious family; though, apparently, it consists only of two people, the Contessa and her daughter. Sometimes I feel that I have already seen enough women without particularly wanting to meet any new ones, whatever their ages. There's something rather monotonous about women—unless, of course, they're like Caroline and her Mamma, which none of them are, or could be. So far the Contessa and her daughter have not appeared. I don't know why not, though no doubt Papa knows. I am told that we are to meet them both tomorrow. I expect very little. I wonder if it will be warm enough for me to wear my green satin dress instead of my green woolen dress? Probably not.

And this is the town where the great, the immortal Lord Byron lives in sin and wildness! Even Mamma has spoken of it several times. Not that this melancholy house is actually *in* the town. It is a villa at some little distance away from it, though I do not know in which direction, and I am sure that Mamma neither knows nor cares. It seemed to me that after we passed through the town this afternoon, w traveled on for fifteen or twenty minutes. Still, to be even in the same *region* as Lord Byron must somewhat move even the hardest heart; and my heart, I am very sure, is not hard in the least.

I find that I have been scribbling away for nearly an hour. Miss Gisborne keeps on saying that I am too prone to the insertion of unnecessary hyphens, and that it is a weakness. If a weakness it is, I intend to cherish it.

I know that an hour has passed because there is a huge clock somewhere that sounds every quarter. It must be a *huge* clock because of the noise it makes, and because everything abroad *is* huge.

I am colder than ever and my arms are quite stiff. But I must drag off my clothes somehow, blow out the candles

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and insinuate my tiny self into this enormous, frightening bed. I do hate the lumps you get all over your body when you travel abroad, and so much hope I don't get many more during the night. Also I hope I don't start feeling thirsty, as there's no water of any kind, let alone water safe to drink.

Ah, Lord Byron, living out there in riot and wickedness! It s impossible to forget him. I wonder what he would think of ne? I do hope there are not too many biting things in this room.

4th October. What a surprise! The Contessa has said it will be quite in order for me to go for short walks in the town, provided I have my maid with me; and when Mamma at once pointed out that I had no maid, offered the services of her own! To think of this happening the very day after I wrote down in this very journal that it could never happen! I am now quite certain that it would have been perfectly correct for me to walk about the other towns too. I daresay that Papa and Mamma suggested otherwise only because of the difficulty about the maid. Of course I *should* have a maid, just as Mamma should have a maid too and Papa a man, and just as we should all have a proper carriage of our own, with our crest on the doors! If it was that we were too poor, it would be humiliating. As we are not too poor (I am sure we are not), it is farcical. In any case, Papa and Mamma went on making a fuss, but the Contessa said we had now entered the States of the Church and were, therefore, all living under the special beneficence of God. The Contessa speaks English very well and even knows the English *idioms*, as Miss Gisborne calls them.

Papa screwed up his face when the Contessa mentioned the States of the Church, as I knew he would. Papa remarked several times while we were on the way here, that the Papal States, as he calls them, are the most misgoverned in Europe and that it was not only as a Protestant that he said so. I wonder. When Papa expresses opinions of that kind, they often seem to me to be just notions of his own, like his notions of the best way to travel. After the Contessa had spoken as she did, I felt—very strongly—that it must be rather beautiful to be ruled directly by the Pope and his cardinals. Of course, the cardinals and even the Pope are subject to error, as are our own Bishops and Rectors, all being but men, as Mr. Biggs-Hartley continually emphasizes at home; but, all the same, they simply *must* be nearer to God than the sort of people who rule us in England.

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I do not think Papa can be depended upon to judge such a question.

I am determined to act upon the Contessa's kind offer. Miss Gisborne says that though I am a pale little thing, I have very much a will of my own. Here will be an opportunity to prove it. There may be certain difficulties because the Contessa's maid can only speak Italian; but when the two of us shall be alone together, it is I who shall be mistress and she who will be maid, and nothing can change that. I have seen the girl. She is a pretty creature, apart from the size of her nose.

Today it has been wet, as usual. This afternoon we drove round Ravenna in the Contessa's carriage: a proper carriage for once, with arms on the doors and a footman as well as the coachman. Papa has paid off our hired coach. I suppose it has lumbered away back to Fusina, opposite to Venice. I expect I can count upon our remaining in Ravenna for a week. That seems to be Papa's usual sojourn in one of our major stopping places. It is not very long, but often it is quite long enough, the way we live.

This afternoon we saw Dante's Tomb, which is simply by the side of the street, and went into a big church with the Throne of Neptune in it, and then into the Tomb of Galla Placidia, which is blue inside, and very beautiful. I was on the alert for any hint of where Lord Byron might reside, but it was quite unnecessary to speculate, because the Contessa almost shouted it out as we rumbled along one of the streets: "The Palazzo Guiccioli. See the netting across the bottom of the door to prevent Lord Byron's animals from straying." "Indeed, indeed," said Papa, looking out more keenly than he had at Dante's Tomb. No more was said, because, though both Papa and Mamma had more than once alluded to Lord Byron's present way of life so that I should be able to understand things that might come up in conversation, yet neither the Contessa nor Papa and Mamma knew how much I might really understand. Moreover, the little Contessina was in the carriage, sitting upon a cushion on the floor at her Mamma's feet, making five of us in all, foreign carriages being as large as everything else foreign; and I daresay *she* knew nothing at all, sweet little innocent.

"Contessina" is only a kind of nickname or *sobriquet*, used by the family and the servants. The Contessina is really a Contessa: in foreign noble families, if one person is a Duke, then all the other men seem to be Dukes also, and all

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the women Duchesses. It is very confusing and nothing like such a good arrangement as ours, where there is only one Duke and one Duchess to each family. I do not know the little Contessina's age. Most foreign girls look far older than they really are, whereas most of our girls look younger. The Contessina is *very* slender, a veritable sylph. She has an olive complexion, with no blemish of any kind. People often write about "olive complexions": the Contessina really has one. She has absolutely enormous eyes, the shape of broad beans, and not far off that in color; but she never uses them to look at anyone. She speaks so little and often has such an empty, lost expression that one might think her more than slightly simple; but I do not think she is. Foreign girls are raised quite differently from the way our girls are raised. Mamma frequently refers to this, pursing her lips. I must admit that I cannot see myself finding in the Contessina a friend, pretty though she is in her own way, with feet about half the size of mine or Caroline's.

When foreign girls grow up to become women, they usually continue, poor things, to look older than they are. I am sure this applies to the Contessa. The Contessa has been very kind to me—in the few hours that I have so far known her—and even seems to be a little sorry for me—as, indeed, I am for her. But I do not understand the Contessa. Where was she last night? Is the little Contessina her only child? What has become of her husband? Is it because he is dead that she seems—and looks—so sad? Why does she want to live in such a big house—it is called a Villa, but one might think it a Palazzo—when it is all falling to bits, and much of it barely even furnished? I should like to ask Mamma these questions, but I doubt whether she would have the right answers, or perhaps any answers.

The Contessa did appear for dinner this evening, and even the little Contessina. Mamma was there too, in that frock I dislike. It really is the wrong kind of red—especially for Italy, where *dark* colors seem to be so much worn. The evening was better than last evening; but then it could hardly have been worse. (Mr. Biggs-Hartley says we should never say that: things can *always* be worse.) It was not a *good* evening. The Contessa was trying to be quite gay, despite her own obvious trouble, whatever that is; but neither Papa nor Mamma know how to respond, and I know all too well that I myself am better at thinking about things than at casting a spell in company.

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What I like most is just a few friends I know really well and whom I can truly trust and love. Alas, it is long since I have had even one such to clasp by the hand. Even letters seem mostly to lose themselves en route, and I can hardly wonder; supposing people are still bothering to write them in the first place, needless to say, which it is difficult to see why they should be after all this time. When dinner was over, Papa and Mamma and the Contessa played an Italian game with both playing cards and dice. The servants had lighted a fire in the Salone and the Contessina sat by it doing nothing and saying nothing. If given a chance, Mamma would have remarked that "the child should have been in bed long ago," and I am sure she should. The Contessa wanted to teach me the game, but Papa said at once that I was too young, which is absolutely farcical. Later in the evening, the Contessa, after playing a quite long time with Papa and Mamma, said that tomorrow she would put her foot down (the Contessa knows so many such expressions that one would swear she must have lived in England) and would *insist* on my learning. Papa screwed his face up and Mamma pursed her lips in the usual way. I had been doing needlework, which I shall never like nor see any point in when servants can always do it for us; and I found that I was thinking many deep thoughts. And then I noticed that a small tear was slowly falling down the Contessa's face. Without thinking, I sprang up; but then the Contessa smiled, and I sat down. One of my deep thoughts was that it is not so much particular disasters that make people cry, but something always there in life itself, something that a light falls on when we are trying to enjoy ourselves in the company of others.

I must admit that the horrid lumps are going down. I certainly do not seem to have acquired any more, which is an advantage when compared with what happened every night in Dijon, that smelly place. But I wish I had a more cheerful room, with better furniture, though tonight I have succeeded in bringing to bed one of our bottles of Mineral Water and even a glass from which to drink it. It is only the Italian Mineral Water, of course, which Mamma says may be very little safer than the ordinary water; but as all the ordinary water seems to come from the dirty wells one sees down the side streets, I think that Mamma exaggerates. I admit, however, that it is not like the bottled water one buys in France. How

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farcical to have to buy water in a bottle, anyway! All the same, there are some things that I have grown to *like* about foreign countries; perhaps even to prefer. It would never do to let Papa and Mamma hear me talk in such a way. I often wish I were not so sensitive, so that the rooms I am given and things of that kind, did not matter so much. And yet Mamma is more sensitive about the water than I am! I am sure it is not so *important*. It can't be. To me it is *obvious* that Mamma is *less* sensitive than I am, where *important* things are concerned. My entire life is based on that obvious fact! My real life, that is.

I rather wish the Contessa would invite me to share *her* room, because I think she is sensitive in the same way that I am. But perhaps the little girl sleeps in the Contessa's room. I should not really mind that. I do not *hate* or even dislike the little Contessina. I expect she already has troubles herself. But Papa and Mamma would never agree to it anyway, and now I have written all there is to write about this perfectly ordinary, but somehow rather odd, day. In this big cold room, I can hardly move with chilliness.

5th October. When I went in to greet Mamma this morning, Mamma had the most singular news. She told me to sit down (Mamma and Papa have more chairs in their rooms than I have, and more of other things too), and then said that there was to be a party! Mamma spoke as though it would be a dreadful ordeal, which it was impossible for us to avoid; and she seemed to take it for granted that I should receive the announcement in the same way. I do not know what I really thought about it. It is true that I have never enjoyed a party yet (not that I have been present at many of them); but all day I have been aware of feeling different inside myself, lighter and swifter in some way, and by this evening I cannot but think it is owing to the knowledge that a party lies before me. After all, foreign parties may be different from parties at home, and probably are. I keep pointing that out to myself. This particular party will be given by the Contessa, who, I feel sure, knows more about it than does Mamma. If she does, it will not be the only thing that the Contessa knows more about than Mamma.

The party is to be the day after tomorrow. While we were drinking our coffee and eating our panini (always very flaky and powdery in Italy), Mamma asked the Contessa whether she was sure there would be time

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enough for the preparations. But the Contessa only smiled—in a very polite way, of course. It is probably easier to do things quickly in Italy (when one really wants to, that is), because everyone has so many servants. It is hard to believe that the Contessa has much money, but she seems to keep more servants than we do, and, what is more, they behave more like slaves than like servants, quite unlike our Derbyshire keel-the-pots. Perhaps it is simply that everyone is so fond of the Contessa. That I should entirely understand. Anyway, preparations for the party have been at a high pitch all day, with people hanging up banners, and funny smells from the kitchen quarters. Even the Bath House at the far end of the formal garden (it is said to have been built by the Byzantines) has had the spiders swept out and been populated with cooks, perpetrating I know not what. The transformation is quite bewildering. I wonder when Mamma first knew of what lay ahead? Surely it must at least have been before we went to bed last night?

I feel I should be vexed that a new dress is so impracticable. A train of seamstresses would have to work day and night for forty-eight hours, as in the fairy tales. I should like that (who would not?), but I am not at all sure that *I* should be provided with a new dress even if whole weeks were available in which to make it. Papa and Mamma would probably still agree that I had quite enough dresses already even if it were the Pope and his cardinals who were going to entertain me. All the same, I am not really vexed. I sometimes think that I am deficient in a proper interest in clothes, as Caroline's Mamma calls it. Anyway, I have learned from experience that new dresses are more often than not thoroughly disappointing. I keep reminding myself of that.

The other important thing today is that I have been out for my first walk in the town with the Contessa's maid, Emilia. I just swept through what Papa had to say on the subject, as I had promised myself. Mamma was lying down at the time, and the Contessa simply smiled her sweet smile and sent for Emilia to accompany me.

I must admit that the walk was not a *complete* success. I took with me our copy of Mr. Grubb's "Handbook to Ravenna and Its Antiquities" (Papa could hardly say No, lest I do something far worse), and began looking places up on the map with a view to visiting them. I felt that this was the best way to start, and that, once started, I could wait to see

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what life would lay before me. I am often quite resolute when there is a specific situation to be confronted. The first difficulty was the quite long walk into Ravenna itself. Though it was nothing at all to me, and though it was not raining, Emilia soon made it clear that she was unaccustomed to walking a step. This could only have been an affectation, or rather pretense, because everyone knows that girls of that kind come from peasant families, where I am quite sure they have to walk about all day, and much more than merely walk about. Therefore, I took no notice at all, which was made easier by my hardly understanding a word that Emilia actually said. I simply pushed and dragged her forward. Sure enough, she soon gave up all her pretenses and made the best of the situation. There were some rough carters on the road and large numbers of horrid children, but for the most part they stopped annoying us as soon as they saw who we were, and in any case it was as nothing to the roads into Derby, where they have lately taken to throwing stones at the passing carriages.

The next trouble was that Emilia was not in the least accustomed to what I had in mind when we reached Ravenna. Of course people do not go again and again to look at their own local antiquities, however old they may be; and least of all, I suspect, Italian people. When she was not accompanying her mistress, Emilia was used to going to Town only for some precise purpose: to buy something, to sell something, or to deliver a letter. There was that in her attitude which made me think of the saucy girls in the old comedies: whose only work is to fetch and carry billets-doux, and sometimes to take the places of their mistresses, with their mistresses' knowledge or otherwise. I did succeed in visiting another of these Bath Houses, this one a public spectacle and called the Baptistry of the Orthodox, because it fell into Christian hands after the last days of the Romans, who built it. It was, of course, far larger than the Bath House in the Contessa's garden, but in the interior rather dark and with a floor so uneven that it was difficult not to fall. There was also a horrible dead animal inside. Emilia began laughing, and it was quite plain what she was laughing at. She was striding about as if she were back on her mountains, and the kind of thing she seemed to be suggesting was that if I proposed to walk all the way to the very heel or toe of Italy she was quite prepared to walk with me, and perhaps to walk ahead

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of me. As an English girl, I did not care for this, nor for the complete reversal of Emilia's original attitude, almost suggesting that she has a deliberate and impertinent policy of keeping the situation between us under her own control. So, as I have said, the walk was not a complete success. All the same, I have made a start. It is obvious that the world has more to offer than would be likely to come my way if I were to spend my whole life creeping about with Papa at one side of me and Mamma at the other. I shall think about how best to deal with Emilia now that I better understand her ways. I was not in the least tired when we had walked back to the Villa. I despise girls who get tired, quite as much as Caroline despises them.

Believe it or not, Mamma was still lying down. When I went in, she said that she was resting in preparation for the party. But the party is not until the day after tomorrow. Poor dear Mamma might have done better not to have left England in the first place! I must take great care that I am not like that when I reach the same time of life and am married, as I suppose I shall be. Looking at Mamma in repose, it struck me that she would still be quite pretty if she did not always look so tired and worried. Of course she was once far prettier than I am now. I know that well. I, alas, am not really pretty at all. I have to cultivate other graces, as Miss Gisborne puts it.

I saw something unexpected when I was going upstairs to bed. The little Contessina had left the Salone before the rest of us and, as usual, without a word. Possibly it was only I who saw her slip out, she went so quietly. I noticed that she did not return and supposed that, at her age, she was quite worn out. Assuredly, Mamma would have said so. But then when I myself was going upstairs, holding my candle, I saw for myself what had really happened. At the landing, as we in England should call it, there is in one of the corners an odd little closet or cabinet, from which two doors lead off, both locked, as I know because I have cautiously turned the handles for myself. In this corner, by the light of my candle, I saw the Contessina, and she was being hugged by a man. I think it could only have been one of the servants, though I was not really able to tell. Perhaps I am wrong about that, but I am not wrong about it being the Contessina. They had been there in complete darkness, and, what is more, they never moved a muscle as I came up the stairs and walked

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calmly along the passage in the opposite direction. I suppose they hoped I should fail to see them in the dimness. They must have supposed that no one would be coming to bed just yet. Or perhaps they were lost to all sense of time, as Mrs. Radcliff expresses it. I have very little notion of the Contessina's age, but she often looks about twelve or even less. Of course I shall say nothing to anybody.

6th October. I have been thinking on and off all day about the differences between the ways we are supposed to behave and the ways we actually do behave. And both are different from the ways in which God calls upon us to behave, and which we can never achieve whatever we do and however hard we apply ourselves, as Mr. Biggs-Hartley always emphasizes. We seem, every one of us, to be at least three different people. And that's just to start with.

I am disappointed by the results of my little excursion yesterday with Emilia. I had thought that there was so much of which I was deprived by being a girl and so being unable to go about on my own, but now I am not sure that I have been missing anything. It is almost as if the nearer one approaches to a thing, the less it proves to be there, to exist at all. Apart, of course, from the bad smells and bad words and horrid rough creatures from which and from whom we women are supposed to be "shielded." But I am waxing metaphysical; against which Mr. Biggs-Hartley regularly cautions us. I wish Caroline were with us. I believe I might feel quite differently about things if she were here to go about with me, just the two of us. Though, needless to say, it would make no difference to us what the things truly were—or were not. It is curious that things should seem not to exist when visited with one person, and then to exist after all if visited with another person. Of course it is all just fancy, but what (I think at moments like this) is not?

I am so friendless and alone in this alien land. It occurs to me that I must have great inner strength to bear up as I do and to fulfill my duties with so little complaint. The Contessa has very kindly given me a book of Dante's verses, with the Italian on one side and an English translation on the page opposite. She remarked that it would aid me to learn more of her language. I am not sure that it will. I have dutifully read through several pages of the book, and there is nothing in this world that I like more than

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reading, but Dante's ideas are so gloomy and complicated that I suspect he is no writer for a woman, certainly not for an English woman. Also his face frightens me, so critical and severe. After looking at his portrait, beautifully engraved at the beginning of the book, I begin to fear that I shall see that face looking over my shoulder as I sit gazing into the looking glass. No wonder Beatrice would have nothing to do with him. I feel that he was quite deficient in the graces that appeal to our sex. Of course one must not even hint such a thing to an Italian, such as the Contessa, for to all Italians Dante is as sacred as Shakespeare or Dr. Johnson is to us.

For once I am writing this during the afternoon. I suspect that I am suffering from ennui and, as that is a sin (even though only a minor one), I am occupying myself in order to drive it off. I know by now that I am much more prone to such lesser shortcomings as ennui and indolence than to such vulgarities as letting myself be embraced and kissed by a servant. And yet it is not that I feel myself wanting in either energy or passion. It is merely that I lack for anything or anyone worthy of such feelings and refuse to spend them upon what is unworthy. But what a "merely" is that! How well I understand the universal ennui that possesses our neighbour, Lord Byron! I, a tiny slip of a girl, feel, at least in this particular, at one with the great poet! There might be consolation in the thought, were I capable of consolation. In any case, I am sure that there will be nothing more that is worth record before my eyes close tonight in slumber.

Later. I was wrong! After dinner tonight, it struck me simply to ask the Contessa whether she had ever *met* Lord Byron. I supposed it might not be a thing she would proclain. unsolicited, either when Papa and Mamma were present, or, for reasons of delicacy, on one of the too rare occasions when she and I were alone; but I thought that I might now be sufficiently simpatica to venture a discreet inquiry.

I fear that I managed it very crudely. When Papa and Mamma had become involved in one of their arguments together, I walked across the room and sat down at the end of the sofa on which the Contessa was reclining; and when she smiled at me and said something agreeable, I simply blurted out my question, quite directly. "Yes, mia cara," she replied, "I have met him, but we cannot invite him

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to our party because he is too political, and many people do not agree with his politics. Indeed, they have already led to several deaths, which some are reluctant to accept at the hands of a straniero, however eminent." And of course it *was* the wonderful possibility of Lord Byron attending the Contessa's party that *had been* at the back of my thoughts. Not for the first time, the Contessa showed her fascinating insight into the minds of others—or assuredly into my mind.

7th October. The day of the party! It is quite early in the morning and the sun is shining as I have not seen it shine for some time. Perhaps it regularly shines at this time of the day, when I am still asleep? "What you girls miss by not getting up!" as Caroline's Mamma always exclaims, though she is the most indulgent of parents. The trouble is that one *always* awakens early just when it is most desirable that one should slumber longest; as today, with the party before us. I am writing this now because I am *quite certain* that I shall be nothing but a tangle of nerves all day and, after everything is over, utterly spent and exhausted. So, for me, it always is with parties! I am glad that the day after tomorrow will be Sunday.

8th October. I met a man at the party who, I must confess, interested me very much; and, besides that, what matters, as Mrs. Fremlinson enquires in "The Hopeful and the Despairing Heart," *almost* my favorite of all books, as I truly declare?

Who could believe it? Just now, while I was still asleep, there was a knocking at my door, just loud enough to awaken me, but otherwise so soft and discreet, and there was the Contessa *herself*, in the most beautiful negligee, half rose-colored and half mauve, with a tray on which were things to eat and drink, a complete foreign breakfast, in fact! I must acknowledge that at that moment I could well have devoured a complete English breakfast, but what could have been kinder or more thoughtful on the part of the charming Contessa? Her dark hair (but not so dark as with the majority of the Italians) had not yet been dressed, and hung about her beautiful, though sad, face, but I noticed that all her rings were on her fingers, flashing and sparkling in in the sunshine. "Alas, mia cara," she said, looking round the room, with its many deficiencies, "the times that were and the times that are." Then she actually bent over my face, rested her hand lightly on the top of my nightgown, and kissed me. "But how pale you look!" she

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continued. "You are white as a lily on the altar." I smiled. "I am English," I said, "and I lack strong coloring." But the Contessa went on staring at me. Then she said, "The party has quite fatigued you?" She seemed to express it as a question, so I replied, with vigor: "Not in the least, I assure you, Contessa. It was the most beautiful evening of my life." (Which was unquestionably the truth and no more than the truth.) I sat up in the big bed and, so doing, saw myself in the glass. It was true that I did look pale, unusually pale. I was about to remark upon the earliness of the hour, when the Contessa suddenly seemed to draw herself together with a gasp and turn remarkably pale herself, considering the native hue of her skin. She stretched out her hand and pointed. She seemed to be pointing at the pillow behind me. I looked round, disconcerted by her demeanor; and I saw an irregular red mark upon the pillow, not a very large mark, but undoubtedly a mark of blood. I raised my hands to my throat. "Dio Illustrissimo!" cried out the Contessa. "Ell' e stregata!" I know enough Italian, from Dante and from elsewhere, to be informed of what that means: "She is bewitched." I leapt out of bed and threw my arms round the Contessa before she could flee, as she seemed disposed to do. I besought her to say more, but I was all the time fairly sure that she would not. Italians, even educated ones, still take the idea of "witchcraft" with a seriousness that to us seems unbelievable, and regularly fear even to speak of it. Here I knew by instinct that Emilia and her mistress would be at one. Indeed, the Contessa seemed most uneasy at my mere embrace, but she soon calmed herself, and left the room saying, quite pleasantly, that she must have a word with my parents about me. She even managed to wish me "buon appetito" of my little breakfast.

I examined my face and throat in the looking glass, and there, sure enough, was a small scar on my neck which explained everything—except, indeed, how I had come by such a mark, but for that the novelties, the rigors, and the excitements of last night's party would *entirely* suffice. One cannot expect to enter the tournament of love and emerge unscratched: and it is into the tournament that, as I thrill to think, I verily have made my way. I fear it is perfectly typical of the Italian manner of seeing things that a perfectly natural, and very tiny, mishap should have such a disproportionate effect upon the Contessa. For

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myself, an English girl, the mark upon my pillow does not even disturb me. We must hope that it does not cast into screaming hysterics the girl whose duty it will be to change the linen.

If I look especially pale, it is partly because the very bright sunlight makes a contrast. I returned at once to bed and rapidly consumed every scrap and drop that the Contessa had brought to me. I seemed quite weak from lack of sustenance, and indeed I have but the slenderest recollection of last night's fare, except that, naturally, I drank far more than on most previous days of my short life, probably more than on *any*.

And now I lie here in my pretty nightgown and nothing else, with my pen in my hand and the sun on my face, and think about *him!* I did not believe such people existed in the real world. I thought that such writers as Mrs. Fremlinson and Mrs. Radcliffe *improved* men, in order to reconcile their female readers to their lot, and to put their less numerous male readers in a good conceit of themselves. Caroline's Mamma and Miss Gisborne, in their quite different ways, have both indicated as much most clearly; and my own observation hitherto of the opposite sex has confirmed the opinion. But now I have actually met a man at whom even Mrs. Fremlinson's finest creation does but hint! He is an Adonis! an Apollo! assuredly a god! Where he treads, sprouts asphodel!

The first romantic thing was that he was not properly presented to me—indeed, he was not presented at all. I know this was very incorrect, but it cannot be denied that it was very exciting. Most of the guests were dancing an old-fashioned *minuetto*, but as I did not know the steps, I was sitting at the end of the room with Mamma, when Mamma was suddenly overcome in some way and had to leave. She emphasized that she would be back in only a minute or two, but almost as soon as she had gone, *he* was standing there, quite as if he had emerged from between the faded tapestries that covered the wall or even from the tapestries themselves, except that he looked very far from faded, though later, when more candles were brought in for Supper, I saw that he was older than I had at first supposed, with such a wise and experienced look as I have never seen on any other face.

Of course he had not only to speak to me at once, or I should have risen and moved away, but to *compel* me, with his eyes and words, to remain. He said something pleasant about my

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being the only rosebud in a garden otherwise autumnal, but I am not such a goose as never to have heard speeches like that before, and it was what he said next that made me fatally hesitate. He said (and never, *never* shall I forget his words): "As we are both visitants from a world that is not this one, we should know one another." It was so exactly what I always feel about myself, as this journal (I fancy) makes clear, that I could not but yield a trifle to his apperceptiveness in finding words for my deepest conviction, extremely irregular and dangerous though I well knew my position to be. *And* he spoke in beautiful English; his accent (not, I think, an Italian one) only making his words the more choice-sounding and delightful!

I should remark here that it was not true that *all* the Contessa's guests were "autumnal," even though most of them certainly were. Sweet creature that she is, she had invited several cavalieri from the local nobility *expressly* for my sake, and several of them had duly been presented to me, but with small conversation resulting, partly because there was so little available of a common tongue, but more because each single cavaliero seemed to me very much what in Derbyshire we call a peg-Jack. It was typical of the Contessa's sympathetic nature that she perceived the unsuccess of these recontres, and made no attempt to fan flames that were never so much as faint sparks. How unlike the matrons of Derbyshire, who, when they have set their minds to the task, will work the bellows in such cases not merely for a whole single evening, but for weeks, months, or on occasion, years! But then it would be unthinkable to apply the word "matron" to the lovely Contessa! As it was, the four cavalieri were left to make what they could of the young Contessina and such other bambine as wer on parade.

I pause for a moment seeking words in which to describe him. He is above the average tall, and, while slender and elegant, conveys a wondrous impression of force and strength. His skin is somewhat pallid, his nose aquiline and commanding (though with quivering, sensitive nostrils), his mouth scarlet and (I must apply the word) passionate. Just to look at his mouth made me think of great poetry and wide seas. His fingers are very long and fine, but powerful in their grip: as I learned for myself before the end of the evening. His hair I at first thought quite black, but I saw later that it was delicately laced with grey,

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perhaps even white. His brow is high, broad, and noble. Am I describing a god or a man? I find it hard to be sure.

As for his conversation I can only say that, indeed, it was not of this world. He proffered none of the empty chatter expected at social gatherings, which, in so far as it has any meaning at all, has a meaning quite different from that which the words of themselves convey—a meaning often odious to me. Everything he said (at least after the first conventional compliment) spoke to something deep within me, and everything I said in reply was what I really wanted to say. I have been able to talk in that way before with no man of any kind, from Papa downwards, and with very few women. And yet I find it difficult to recall what subjects we discussed. I think that may be a *consequence* of the feeling with which we spoke. The feeling I not merely recollect but feel still—all over and through me—deep and warm—transfiguring. The subjects, no. They were life, and beauty, and art, and nature, and myself: in fact, *everything*. Everything, that is, except the very different and very silly things that almost everyone else talks about all the time, chatter and chump without stopping this side of the churchyard. He did once observe that "words are what prevail with women," and I could only smile, it was so true.

Fortunately, Mamma *never* reappeared. As for the rest of them, I daresay they were more relieved than otherwise to find the gauche little English girl off their hands, so to speak, and apparently provided for. With Mamma indisposed, the obligation to watch over me would descend upon the Contessa, but her I saw only in the distance. Perhaps she was resolved not to intrude where *I* should not wish it. If so, it would be what I should expect of her. I do not know.

Then came Supper. Much to my surprise (and chagrin), my friend, if so I may call him, excused himself from participating. His explanation, lack of appetite, could hardly be accepted as sufficient or courteous, but the words he employed, succeeded (as always, I feel, with him) in purging the offense. He affirmed most earnestly that I must sustain myself even though he were unable to escort me, and that he would await my return. As he spoke, he gazed at me so movingly that I could but accept the situation, though I daresay I had as little appetite (for the coarse foods of this world) as he. I perceive that I have so far omitted to refer to the beauty and power

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of his eyes, which are so dark as to be almost black—at least by the light of candles. Glancing back at him, perhaps a little keenly, it occurred to me that he might be bashful about showing himself in his full years by the bright lights of the Supper tables. It is a vanity *by no means* confined to my own sex. Indeed he seemed almost to be shrinking away from the augmented brightness even at this far end of the room. And this for all the impression of strength which was the most marked thing about him. Tactfully I made to move off. "You will return?" he asked, so anxiously and compellingly. I remained calm. I merely smiled.

And then Papa caught hold of me. He said that Mamma, having gone upstairs, had succumbed totally, as I might have known in advance she would do, and in fact *did* know; and that, when I had supped, I had "better come upstairs also." At that Papa elbowed me through to the tables and started trying to stuff me like a turkey, but, as I have said, I had little gusto for it, so little that I cannot now name a single thing that I ate, or that Papa ate either. Whatever it was, I "washed it down" (as we say in Derbyshire) with an unusual quantity (for me) of the local wine, which people, including Papa, always say is so "light," but which always seems to me no "lighter" than any other, but noticeably "heavier" than some I could name. What is more, I had already consumed a certain amount of it earlier in the evening when I was supposed to be flirting with the local peg-Jacks. One curious thing is that Papa, who never fails to demur at my doing almost anything else, seems to have no objection to my drinking wine quite heavily. I do not think I have ever known him even try to impose a limit. That is material, of course, only in the rare absence of Mamma, to whom this observation does not apply. But Mamma herself is frequently unwell after only two or three glasses. At Supper last night, I was in a state of "trance": eating food was well-nigh impossible, but drinking wine almost fatally facile. Then Papa started trying to push me off to bed again. After all that wine, and with my new friend patiently waiting for me, it was farcical. But I had to dispose of Papa somehow, so I promised him faithfully, and forgot my promise (whatever it was) immediately. Mercifully, I have not so far set eyes upon Papa since that moment.

Or, in reality, upon *anyone* until the Contessa waked me this morning: on anyone but *one*.

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There he was quietly awaiting me among the shadows cast by the slightly swaying tapestries and by the flapping bannerets ranged round the walls above us. This time he actually clutched my hand in his eagerness. It was only for a moment, of course, but I felt the firmness of his grip. He said he hoped he was not keeping me from the dance floor, but I replied no, oh, No. In truth, I was barely even capable of dancing at that moment; and I fancy that the measures trod by the musty relics around us were, at the best of times, not for me. Then he said, with a slight smile, that once he had been a great dancer. Oh, I said idly and under the power of the wine; where was that? At Versailles, he replied; and in Petersburg. I must say that, wine or no wine, this surprised me; because surely, as everyone knows, Versailles was burned down by the incendiaries in 1789, a good thirty years ago? I must have glanced at him significantly, because he then said, smiling once more, though faintly: "Yes, I am very, *very* old." He said it with such curious emphasis that he did not seem to demand some kind of a denial, as such words normally do. In fact, I could find nothing immediate to say at all. And yet it was nonsense, and denial would have been sincere. I do not know his age, and find even an approximation difficult, but "very, very old" he most certainly is not, but in all important ways one of the truly youngest people that can be imagined, and one of the most truly ardent. He was wearing the most beautiful black clothes, with a tiny Order of some kind, I am sure *most* distinguished, because so unobtrusive. Papa has often remarked that the flashy display of Honors is no longer correct.

In some ways the most romantic thing of all is that I do not even know his name. As people were beginning to leave the party, not so very late, I suppose, as most of the people were, after all, quite old, he took my hand and this time held it, nor did I even affect to resist. "We shall meet again," he said, "many times," looking so deeply and steadily into my eyes that I felt he had penetrated my inmost heart and soul. Indeed, there was something so powerful and mysterious about my own feelings at that moment that I could only murmur "Yes," in a voice so weak that he could hardly have heard me, and then cover my eyes with my hands, those eyes into which he had been gazing so piercingly. For a moment (it cannot have been longer, or my discomposure would have been observed by others), I sank

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down into a chair with all about me black and swimming, and when I had recovered myself, he was no longer there, and there was nothing to do but be kissed by the Contessa who said, "You're looking tired, child," and be hastened to my big bed, immediately.

And though new emotions are said to deprive us of rest (as I have myself been able to confirm on one or two occasions), I seem to have *slept* immediately too, and very deeply, and for a very long time. I know, too, that I dreamed remarkably, but I cannot at all recollect of what. Perhaps I do not need the aid of memory, for surely I can surmise?

On the first occasion since I have been in Italy, the sun is truly very hot. I do not think I shall write any more today. I have already covered pages in my small, clear handwriting, which owes so much to Miss Gisborne's patience and severity, and to her high standards in all matters touching young girlhood. I am rather surprised that I have been left alone for so long. Though Papa and Mamma do not seem to me to accomplish very much in proportion to the effort they expend, yet they are very inimical to "lying about and doing nothing," especially in my case, but in their own cases also, as I must acknowledge. I wonder how Mamma is faring after the excitements of last night? I am sure I should arise, dress, and ascertain; but instead I whisper to myself that once more I feel powerfully drawn towards the embrace of Morpheus.

9th October. Yesterday morning I decided that I had already recorded enough for one single day (though for what wonderful events I had to try, however vainly, to find words!), but there are few private occupations in this world about which I care more than inscribing the thoughts and impressions of my heart in this small, secret journal, which no one else shall ever in this world see (I shall take good care of that), so that I am sure I should again have taken up my pen in the evening, had there been any occurrence sufficiently definite to write about. *That*, I fear, is what Miss Gisborne would call one of my overloaded sentences, but overloaded sentences can be the reflection, I am sure, of overloaded spirits, and even be their only relief and outlet! How well at this moment do I recall Miss Gisborne's moving counsel: Only find the right words for your troubles, and your troubles become half joys. Alas, for me at this hour there can be no right words: in some

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strange way that I can by no means grasp hold of, I find myself fire and ice in equal parts. I have never before felt so greatly alive and yet I catch in myself an eerie conviction that my days are now closely numbered. It does not frighten me, as one would expect it to do. Indeed, it is very nearly a relief. I have never moved at my ease in this world, despite all the care that has been lavished on me; and if I had never known Caroline, hitherto my dearest friend (and sometimes her Mamma too), by comparison with. . . .Oh, there *are* no words. Also I have not completely recovered from the demands which last night made upon me. This is something I am rather ashamed of and shall admit to no one. But it is true. As well as being torn by emotion, I am worn to a silken thread.

The Contessa, having appeared in my room yesterday morning, then disappeared and was not seen again all day, as on the day we arrived. All the same she seemed to have spoken to Mamma about me, as she had said she would be doing. This soon became clear.

It was already afternoon before I finally rose from my bed and ventured from my sunny room. I was feeling very hungry once more, and I felt that I really must find out whether Mamma was fully recovered. So I went first and knocked at the door of Mamma and Papa's rooms. As there was no answer, I went downstairs, and, though there was no one else around (when it is at all sunny, most Italians simply lie down in the shade), there was Mamma, in full and blooming health, on the terrace overlooking the garden. She had her workbox with her and was sitting in the full sun trying to do two jobs at once, perhaps three, in her usual manner. When Mamma is feeling quite well, she always fidgets terribly. I fear that she lacks what the gentleman we met in Lausanne called "the gift of repose." (I have never forgotten that expression.)

Mamma set about me at once. "Why didn't you dance with even one of those nice young men whom the Contessa had gone to the trouble of inviting simply for your sake? The Contessa is very upset about it. Besides, what have you been doing all the morning? This lovely, sunny day? And what is all this other rubbish the Contessa has been trying to tell me about you? I cannot understand a word of it. Perhaps you can enlighten me? I suppose it is something I ought to know about. No doubt it is a consequence of your Father and Mother agreeing to

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your going into the town on your own?"

Needless to say, I know by this time how to reply to Mamma when she rants on in terms such as these.

"The Contessa is very upset about it all," Mamma exclaimed again after I had spoken; as if a band of knaves had stolen all the spoons, and I had been privy to the crime. "She is plainly hinting at something which courtesy prevents her putting into words, and it is something to do with you. I should be obliged if you would tell me what it is. Tell me at once," Mamma commanded very fiercely.

Of course I was aware that something had taken place between the Contessa and me that morning, and by now I knew very well what lay behind it: in one way or another the Contessa had divined my recontre of the evening before and had realized something (though how far from the whole!) of the effect it had made upon me. Even to me she had expressed herself in what English people would regard as an overwrought, Italianate way. It was clear that she had said something to Mamma on the subject, but of a veiled character, as she did not wish actually to betray me. She had, indeed, informed me that she was going to do this, and I now wished that I had attempted to dissuade her. The fact is that I had been so somnolent as to be half without my wits.

"Mamma," I said, with the dignity I have learned to display at these times, "if the Contessa has anything to complain of in my conduct, I am sure she will complain only when I am present." And, indeed, I *was* sure of that; though doubtful whether the Contessa would ever consider complaining about me at all. Her addressing herself to Mamma in the present matter was, I could be certain, an attempt to aid me in some way, even though possibly misdirected, as was almost inevitable with someone who did not know Mamma very well.

"You are defying me, child," Mamma almost screamed. "You are defying your own Mother." She had so worked herself up (surely about nothing? even less than usual?) that she managed to prick herself. Mamma is constantly pricking herself when she attempts needlework, mainly, I always think, because she *will* not concentrate upon any one particular task, and she keeps a wad of lint in her box against the next time it occurs. This time, however, the lint seemed to be missing and she appeared to have inflicted quite a gash. Poor Mamma flapped about like a bird beneath a net,

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while the blood was beginning to flow quite freely. I bent forward and sucked it away with my tongue. It was really strange to have Mamma's blood in my mouth. The strangest part was that it tasted delightful; almost like an exceptionally delicious sweetmeat! I feel my own blood mantling to my cheek as I write the words now.

Mamma then managed to staunch the miniature wound with her pocket handkerchief: one of the pretty ones she had purchased in Besancon. She was looking at me in her usual critical way, but all she said was: "It is perhaps fortunate that we are leaving here on Monday."

Though it was our usual routine, nothing had been said on the present occasion, and I was aghast. (Here, I suppose, *was* something definite to record yesterday evening!)

"What!" I cried. "Leave the sweet Contessa so soon! Leave, within only a week, the town where Dante walked and wrote!" I smile a little as I perceive how, without thinking, I am beginning to follow the flamboyant Italian way of putting things. I am not really sure that Dante did *write* anything much in Ravenna, but to Italians such objections have little influence upon the choice of words. I realize that it is a habit I must guard against.

"Where Dante walked may be not at all a suitable place for you to walk," rejoined Mamma, uncharitably, but with more sharpness of phrase and thought than is customary with her. She was fondling her injured thumb the while, and had nothing to mollify her acerbity towards me. The blood was beginning to redden the impromptu bandage, and I turned away with what writers call "very mixed feelings."

All the same, I did manage to see some more of the wide world before we leave Ravenna; and on the very next day, this day, Sunday, and even though it is a Sunday. Apparently, there is no English church in Ravenna, so that all we could compass was for Papa to read a few prayers this morning and go through the Litany, with Mamma and me making the responses. The Major-Domo showed the three of us to a special room for the purpose. It had nothing in it but an old table with shaky legs and a line of wooden chairs; all dustier and more decrepit even than other things I have seen in the Villa. Of course all this has happened in previous places when it was a Sunday, but never before under such dispiriting conditions—even, as I felt, *unhealthy* conditions. I was *most* disagreeably affected by the entire experience and

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entirely unable to imbibe the Word of God, as I should have done. I have never felt like that before even at the least uplifting of Family Prayers. Positively *irreverent* thoughts raced uncontrolledly through my little head: for example, I found myself wondering how efficacious God's Word could be for Salvation when droned and stumbled over by a mere uncanonized layman such as Papa—no, I mean, of course, *unordained*, but I have let the first word stand because it is so comic when applied to Papa, who is always denouncing "the Roman Saints" and all they represent, such as frequent days of public devotion in their honor. English people speak so unkindly of the Roman Catholic priests, but at least they have all, including the most unworthy of them, been touched by hands that go back and back and back to Saint Peter and so to the Spurting Fountain of Grace itself. You can hardly say the same for Papa, and I believe that even Mr. Biggs-Hartley's consecrationary position is a matter of dispute. I feel very strongly that the Blood of the Lamb cannot be mediated unless by the Elect or washed in by hands that are not strong and white.

Oh, how can he fulfill his promise that "we shall meet again," if Papa and Mamma drag me, protesting, from the place where we met first? Let alone meet "many times"? These thoughts distract me, as I need not say; and yet I am quite sure that they distract me less than one might expect. For that the reason is simple enough: deep within me I *know* that some wondrous thing, some special election, has passed between him and me, and that meet again we shall in consequence, and no doubt "many times." Distracted about it all though I am, I am simultaneously so sure as to be almost at peace: fire and ice, as I have said. I find I can still sometimes think about other things, which was by no means the case when I fancied, long, long ago, that I was "in love" (perish the thought!) with Mr. Franklin Stobart. Yes, yes, my wondrous friend has brought to my wild soul a measure of peace at last! I only wish I did not feel so tired. Doubtless it will pass when the events of the night before last are more distant (what sadness, though, when they are! What sadness, happen what may!), and, I suppose, this afternoon's tiring walk also. No, *not* "tiring." I refuse to admit the word, and that malapert Emilia returned home "fresh as a daisy," to use the expression her kind of person uses where I come from.

But what a walk it proved to

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be, none the less! We wandered through the *Pineta di Classe:* a perfectly enormous forest between Ravenna and the sea, with pine trees like very thick, dark, bushy umbrellas, and, so they say, either a brigand or a beast hiding behind each one of them! I have never seen such pine trees before; not in France or Switzerland or the Low Countries, let alone in England. They are more like trees in the Thousand Nights and a Night (not that I have read that work), dense enough at the top and stout-trunked enough for rocs to nest in! And such countless numbers of them, all so old! Left without a guide, I should easily have found myself lost within only a few minutes, so many and so vague are the different tracks among the huge conifers; but I have to admit that Emilia, quite shed now of her bien élevée finicking, strode out almost like a boy, and showed a knowledge of the best routes that I could only wonder at and take advantage of. There is now almost an understanding between me and Emilia, and it is mainly from her that I am learning an amount of Italian that is beginning quite to surprise me. All the time I recall, however, that it is a very simple language: the great poet of "Paradise Lost" (not that I have read that work either) remarked that it was unnecessary to set aside special periods for instruction in Italian, because one could simply pick it up as one went along. So it is proving between me and Emilia.

The forest routes are truly best suited to gentlemen on horseback, and at one place two such emerged from one of the many tracks going off to our left. "Guardi!" cried out Emilia and clutched my arm as if she were my intimate. "Milord Byron and Signor Shelley!" (I do not attempt to indicate Emilia's funny approximation to the English names.) What a moment in my life—or in anyone's life! To see at the same time two persons both so great and famous and both so irrevocably doomed! There was not, of course, time enough for any degree of close observation, though Mr. Shelley seemed slightly to acknowledge with his crop our standing back a little to allow him and his friend free passage; but I fear that my main impression was of both giaours looking considerably older than I had expected and Lord Byron considerably more corpulent (as well as being quite grey-headed, though I believe only at the start of his life's fourth decade). Mr. Shelley was remarkably untidy in his dress and Lord Byron most comical: in that respect at least, the reality was in accord with the report. Both were without hats or caps. They

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cantered away down the track up which we had walked. They were talking in loud voices (Mr. Shelley's noticeably high in pitch), both together, above the thudding of their horses's hoofs. Neither of them really stopped talking even when slowing in order to wheel, so to speak, round the spot where we stood.

And so I have at length set eyes upon the fabled Lord Byron! A wondrous moment indeed; but how much more wondrous for me if it had occurred before that recent most wondrous of all possible moments! But it would be very wrong of me to complain because the red and risen moon has quite dimmed my universal nightlight! Lord Byron, that child of destiny, is for the whole world and, no doubt, for all time, or at least for a great deal of it! My fate is a different one and I draw it to my breast with a young girl's eager arms!

"Come gentili!" exclaimed Emilia, gazing after our two horsemen. It was not perhaps the most appropriate comment upon Lord Byron, or even upon Mr. Shelley, but there was nothing for me to reply (even if I could have found the Italian words), so on went our walk, with Emilia now venturing so far as to sing, in a quite pretty voice, and me lacking heart to chide her, until in the end the pine trees parted and I got my first glimpse of the Adriatic Sea, and, within a few more paces, a whole wide prospect of it. (The Venetian Lagoon I refuse to take seriously.) The Adriatic Sea is linked with the Mediterranean Sea, indeed quite properly a part or portion of it, so that I can now say to myself that I have "seen the Mediterranean"; which good old Doctor Johnson defined as the true object of all Travel. It was almost as if at long last my own eyes had seen the Holy Grail, with the Redemptive Blood streaming forth in golden splendor; and I stood for whole moments quite lost in my own deep thoughts. The world falls from me once more in a moment as I muse upon that luminous, rapturous flood.

But I can write no more. So unwontedly weary do I feel that the vividness of my vision notwithstanding is something to be marveled at. It is as if my hand were guided as was Isabella's by the distant Traffio in Mrs. Fremlinson's wonderful book; so that Isabella was enabled to leave a record of the strange events that preceded her death—without which record, as it now occurs to me, the book, fiction though it be, could hardly with sense have been written at all. The old moon is drenching my sheets and my nightgown in brightest crimson.

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In Italy, the moon is always full and always so red.

Oh, when next shall I see my friend, my paragon, my genius!

10th October. I have experienced so sweet and great a dream that I must write down the fact before it is forgotten, and even though I find that already there is almost nothing left that *can* be written. I have dreamed that he was with me; that he indued my neck and breast with kisses that were at once the softest and the sharpest in the world; that he filled my ears with thoughts so strange that they could have come only from a world afar.

And now the Italian dawn is breaking: all the sky is red and purple. The rains have gone, as if forever. The crimson sun calls to me to take flight before it is once more autumn and then winter. Take flight! Today we are leaving for Rimini! Yes, it is but to Rimini that I am to repair. It is farcical.

And in my dawn-red room there is once again blood upon my person. But this time I know. It is at his embrace that my being springs forth, in joy and welcome; his embrace that is at once the softest and sharpest in the world. How strange that I could ever have failed to recall such bliss!

I rose from my bed to look for water, there being, once more, none in my room. I found that I was so weak with happiness that I all but fainted. But after sinking for a moment upon my bed, I somewhat recovered myself and succeeded in gently opening the door. And what should I find there? Or, rather, whom? In the faintly lighted corridor stood silently none other than the little Contessina, whom I cannot recollect having previously beheld since her Mamma's soirée à danse. She was dressed in some kind of loose dark wrapper, and I may only leave between her and her conscience what she can have been doing. No doubt for some good reason allied therewith, she seemed turned to stone by the sight of *me*. Of course I was in déshabillé even more complete than her own. I had omitted even to cover my nightgown. And upon that there was blood—as if I had suffered an injury. When I walked towards her reassuringly (after all, we are but two young girls and I am not her Judge—nor anyone's), she gave a low croaking scream and fled from me as if I had been the Erl Queen herself, but still almost silently, no doubt for her same good reasons. It was foolish of the little Contessina, because all I had in mind to do was to take her in my arms, and then to kiss her in token of our common humanity and the strangeness

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of our encounter at such an hour.

I was disconcerted by the Contessina's childishness (these Italians manage to be shrinking bambine and hardened women of the world at one and the same time), and, again feeling faint, leaned against the passage wall. When I stood full on my feet once more, I saw by the crimson light coming through one of the dusty windows that I had reached out to stop myself falling and left a scarlet impression of my hand on the painted plaster. It is difficult to excuse and impossible to remove. How I weary of these règles and conventionalities by which I have hitherto been bound! How I long for the measureless liberty that has been promised me and of which I feel so complete a future assurance!

But I managed to find some water (the Contessa's Villa is no longer of the kind that has servitors alert—or supposedly alert—all night in the larger halls), and with this water I did what I could, at least in my own room. Unfortunately I had neither enough water nor enough strength to do all. Besides, I begin to grow reckless.

11th October. No dear dream last night. Considerable crafty unpleasantness, however, attended our departure yesterday from Ravenna. Mamma disclosed that the Contessa was actually lending us her own carriage. "It's because she wants to see the last of us," said Mamma to me, looking at the cornice. "How can that be Mamma?" I asked. "Surely, she's hardly seen us at all? She was invisible when we arrived, and now she's been invisible again for days." "There's no connection between those two things," Mamma replied. "At the time we arrived, the Contessa was feeling unwell, as we Mothers often do, you'll learn that for yourself soon. But for the last few days, she's been very upset by your behavior, and now she wants us to go." As Mamma was still looking at the wall instead of at me, I put out the tip of my tongue, only the merest scrap of it, but *that* Mamma did manage to see, and had lifted her hand several inches before she recollected that I was now as good as an adult and so not to be corrected by a simple cuff.

And then when we were all about to enter the draggled old carriage, lo and behold, the Contessa did manage to haul herself into the light, and I caught her actually crossing herself behind my back, or what she no doubt thought was

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behind my back. I had to clench my hands to stop myself spitting at her. I have since begun to speculate whether she did not really *intend* me to see what she did. I was once so fond of the Contessa, so drawn to her—I can still *remember* that quite well—but *all* is now changed. A week, I find, can sometimes surpass a lifetime; and so, for that matter, can one single indelible night. The Contessa took great care to prevent her eyes once meeting mine, though, as soon as I perceived this, I never for a moment ceased glaring at her like a little basilisk. She apologized to Papa and Mamma for the absence of the Contessina, whom she described as being in bed with screaming megrims or the black cramp or some other malady (I truly cared not what! nor care now!) no doubt incident to girlish immaturity in Italy! And Papa and Mamma made response as if they really minded about the silly little child! Another way of expressing their disapproval of *me*, needless to observe. My considered opinion is that the Contessina and her Mamma are simply two of a kind, but that the Contessa has had time to become more skilled in concealment and duplicity. I am sure that all Italian females are alike, when one really knows them. The Contessa had made me dig my fingernails so far into my palms that my hands hurt all the rest of the day and still look as if I had caught a dagger in each of them, as in Sir Walter Scott's tale.

We had a coachman and a footman on the box, neither of them at all young, but more like two old wiseacres; and, when we reached Classe, we stopped in order that Papa, Mamma, and I could go inside the church, which is famous for its Mosaics, going back, as usual, to the Byzantines. The big doors at the western end were open in the quite hot sunshine and indeed the scene inside did look very pretty, all pale azure, the color of Heaven, and shining gold; but I saw no more of it than that, because as I was about to cross the threshold, I was again overcome by my faintness, and sitting down on a bench, bade Papa and Mamma go in without me, which they immediately did, in the sensible English way, instead of trying to make an ado over me, in the silly Italian way. The bench was of marble, with arms in the shape of lions, and though the marble was worn, and cut, and pock-marked, it was a splendid, heavy object, carved, if I mistake not, by the Romans themselves. Seated on it, I soon felt better once more, but then I noticed the two fat old men

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on the coach doing something or other to the doors and windows. I supposed they were greasing them, which I am sure would have been very much in order, as would have been a considerable application of paint to the entire vehicle. But when Papa and Mamma at last come out of the church, and we all resumed our places, Mamma soon began to complain of a smell, which she said was, or at least resembled, that of the herb, garlic. Of course when one is abroad, the smell of garlic is *everywhere*, so that I quite understood when Papa merely told Mamma not to be fanciful; but then I found that I myself was more and more affected, so that we completed the journey in almost complete silence, none of us, except Papa, having much appetite for the very crude meal set before us en route at Cesenatico. "You're looking white," said Papa to me, as we stepped from the coach. Then he added to Mamma, but hardly attempting to prevent my hearing, "I can see why the Contessa spoke to you as she did." Mamma merely shrugged her shoulders: something she would never have thought of doing before we came abroad, but which now she does frequently. I nearly said something spiteful. At the end, the Contessa was constantly disparaging my appearance, and indeed I am pale, paler than I once was, though always I have been pale enough, pale as a little phantom; but only I know the reason for the change in me, and no one else shall know it ever, because no one else ever can. It is not so much a "secret." Rather it is a revelation.

In Rimini we are but stopping at the inn; and we are almost the only persons to be doing so. I cannot wonder at this: the inn is a gaunt, forbidding place; the Padrona has what in Derbyshire we call a "harelip"; and the attendance is of the worst. Indeed, no one has so far ventured to come near me. All the rooms, including mine, are very large; and all lead into one another, in the style of two hundred years ago. The building resembles a Palazzo that has fallen upon hard times, and perhaps that is what it is. At first I feared that my dear Papa and Mamma were to be ensconced in the apartment adjoining my own, which would have suited me not at all, but, for some reason, it has not happened, so that between my room and the staircase are two dark and empty chambers, which would once have caused me alarm, but which now I welcome. Everything is poor and dusty. Shall I ever repose abroad in such ease and bien-être as one takes for

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granted in Derbyshire? Why, no, I shall not: and a chill runs down my back as I inscribe the words; but a chill more of excitement than of fear. Very soon now shall I be entirely elsewhere and entirely above such trivia.

I have opened a pair of the big windows, a grimy and, I fear, a noisy task. I flitted out in the moonlight on to the stone balcony, and gazed down into the Piazza. Rimini seems now to be a very poor town, and there is nothing of the nocturnal uproar and riot which are such usual features of Italian existence. At this hour, all is completely silent—even strangely so. It is still very warm, but there is a mist between the Earth and the Moon.

I have crept into another of these enormous Italian beds. He is winging towards me. There is no further need for words. I have but to slumber, and that will be simple, so exhausted I am.

12th, 13th, 14th October. Nothing to relate but him, and of him nothing that can be related. (I am very tired, but it is tiredness that follows exaltation, not the vulgar tiredness of common life; I noticed today that I no longer have either shadow or reflection.) Fortunately Mamma was quite destroyed (as the Irish simpletons express it) by the journey from Ravenna, and has not been seen since. How many, many hours one's elders pass in retirement! How glad I am never to have to experience such bondage! How I rejoice when I think about the new life which spreads before me into infinity, the new ocean which already laps at my feet, the new vessel with the purple sail and the red oars upon which I shall at any moment embark! When one is confronting so tremendous a transformation, how foolish some words, but the habit of them lingers even when I have hardly strength to hold the pen! Soon, soon, new force will be mine, fire that is inconceivable; and the power to assume any night-shape that I may wish, or to fly through the darkness with none. What love is his! How chosen among all women am I; and I am just a little English girl! It is a miracle, and I shall enter the halls of Those Other Women with pride.

Papa is so beset by Mamma that he has failed to notice that I am eating nothing and drinking only water; that at our horrid, odious meals I am but feigning.

Believe it or not, yesterday we visited, Papa and I, the Tempio Malatestiano. Papa went as an English Visitor: I (at least by comparison with Papa)

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as a Pythoness. It is a beautiful edifice, among the most beautiful in the world, they say. But for me a special splendor lay in the noble and amorous dead it houses, and in the control over them which I feel increase within me. I was so rent and torn with new power that Papa had to help me back to the inn. Poor Papa, burdened, as he supposes, by *two* weak invalid women! I could almost pity him.

I wish I had reached the pretty little Contessina and kissed her throat.

15th October. Last night I opened my pair of windows (the other pair resists me, weak—in terms of this world—as I am) and, without quite venturing forth, stood there in nakedness and raised both my arms. Soon a soft wind began to rustle, where all had previously been still as death. The rustling steadily rose to roaring, and the faint chill of the night turned to heat as when an oven door is opened. A great crying out and weeping, a buzzing and screaming and scratching swept in turmoil past the open window, as if invisible (or almost invisible) bodies were turning around and around in the air outside, always lamenting and accusing. My head was split apart by the sad sounds and my body as moist as if I were an ottoman. Then, on an instant, all had passed by. He stood there before me in the dim embrasure of the window. "That," he said, "is Love as the elect of this world know it." "The *elect?*" I besought him, in a voice so low that it was hardly a voice at all (but what matter?). "Why yes," he seemed to reaffirm. "Of this world, the elect."

16th October. The weather in Italy changes constantly. Today once more it is cold and wet.

They have begun to suppose me ill. Mamma, back on her legs for a spell, is fussing like a blowfly round a dying lamb. They even called in a Medico, after discussing at length in my presence whether an Italian physician could be regarded as of any utility. With what voice I have left, I joined in vigorously that he could not. All the same, a creature made his appearance: wearing fusty black, and, believe it or not, a grey *wig*—in all, a veritable Pantalone. What a farce! With my ever sharper fangs, I had him soon despatched, and yelling like the Old Comedy he belonged to. Then I spat forth his enfeebled, senile lymph, cleaned my lips of his skin and smell, and returned, hugging myself, to my couch.

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Janua mortis vita, as Mr. Biggs-Hartley says in his funny Dog Latin. And to think that today is Sunday! I wonder why no one has troubled to pray over me?

17th October. I have been left alone all day. Not that it matters.

Last night came the strangest and most beautiful event of my life, a seal laid upon my future.

I was lying here with my double window open, when I noticed that mist was coming in. I opened my arms to it, but my blood began to trickle down my bosom from the wound in my neck, which of course no longer heals—though I seem to have no particular trouble in concealing the mark from the entire human race, not forgetting learned men with certificates from the University of Sciozza.

Outside in the Piazza was a sound of shuffling and nuzzling, as of sheep being folded on one of the farms at home. I climbed out of bed, walked across, and stepped on to the balcony.

The mist was filtering the moonlight into a silver-grey that I have never seen elsewhere.

The entire Piazza, a very big one, was filled with huge, grizzled wolves, all perfectly silent, except for the small sounds I have mentioned, all with their tongues flopping and lolling, black in the silvery light, and all gazing up at my window.

Rimini is near to the Apennine Mountains, where wolves notoriously abound, and commonly devour babies and small children. I suppose that the coming cold is drawing them into the towns.

I smiled at the wolves. Then I crossed my hands on my little bosom and curtsied. They will be prominent among my new people. My blood will be theirs, and theirs mine.

I forgot to say that I have contrived to lock my door. Now, I am assisted in such affairs.

Somehow I have found my way back to bed. It has become exceedingly cold, almost icy. For some reason I think of all the empty rooms in this battered old Palazzo (as I am sure it once was), so fallen from their former stateliness. I doubt if I shall write any more. I do not think I shall have any more to say.

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Here's an inventive and action-filled story about a strange civilization of "islanders" who depend on an increasingly hostile sea for their livelihood and who seem headed for the end of the line. David Garnett has written MIRROR IN THE SKY and THE STARSEEKERS, both published by Berkley.

Da Capo

by DAVID S. GARNETT

"There are more than ever before," he heard the first of his guards say to the one who held his hands behind his back. To which the other replied: "This is enough to keep them happy." Then he laughed and thumped Craylix in the small of his back.

All the people of the island seemed to be gathered on the foredeck. Craylix was pushed through them, to where several baskets of fish were lined up a pace from the side. They halted him before they got that far, however, while the chief spoke to his people.

But the prisoner did not listen to the islander's words. Instead, he glanced down to where the sea was disturbed by scores of the creatures swimming close to the surface. Every few seconds a bloated head would emerge, stare about blindly, then swiftly disappear again. They were waiting for their supper, he thought grimly. The supply of fish seemed far from adequate, and idly he reflected that his own meager body would not go far amongst so many hungry predators.

ONE

It was at the first of his nets that they lay in wait for him, clinging to the ropes and lines below the surface until he was directly overhead.

Leaning over the side of the canoe, Craylix had begun to haul in on the rope attached to one of the spherical floats which gently bobbed on the calm surface. He was watching the place where the rope left the water, but from the corner of his eye he caught a slight blur of movement in the sea

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near the bows. That was the only warning he needed. Quickly, he dropped the line and moved back just as the canoe started to rock violently, his unseen attackers trying to overturn the craft. Yet their attempts were in vain; the outrigger canoe was far too stable. Nor did they succeed in toppling the islander into the sea. Craylix did not even lose his balance.

A dripping scaled arm reached over the side, and Craylix grabbed for his barbed harpoon, thrusting the weapon at the fishman's warped limb. It was withdrawn hastily, cold blood leaking from the wound.

Then a head broke surface on the other side, between the canoe and its float, barely two arm lengths from where the terrified islander crouched. Never had Craylix seen one of the creatures this close before, and even firsthand tales from those who had done so could only hint at the awful truth: round head, wrinkled and tinged green; huge opaque eyes; the tiniest of nostrils where there should have been a nose; mouth half open to reveal a row of deadly sharp teeth. The thing was a caricature of a human being. That was the impression from a single glance. There was no time for more, because he heard the sound of parting water again. Craylix spun around in time to see another fishman, or possibly the one he had wounded, take hold of the bows, dragging the frail craft down, and start to heave itself aboard.

Its arms were thick and powerful, hands webbed, fingers terminating in wickedly hooked claws. The youth had seen what those claws could do—the slashed limbs and bodies of the people who had survived similar encounters with the ferocious underwater dwellers. It was big, almost half as tall as Craylix himself, perhaps twice his weight. The islander had heard this, too, but had put it down to the accepted boasting of those who claimed to have come across the fishmen and lived to tell of it. But there were very few of these, and most did not survive more than a few days, even those whose wounds appeared only superficial.

All this crossed his mind in but a moment—the same moment in which he stepped back, raised his harpoon and hurled it straight at the beast. It took the creature in the throat, transfixing its almost nonexistent neck, and it toppled backwards into the sea. The fishman sank, the line from the harpoon paying out over the boat's side until it suddenly jerked tight.

Craylix glanced around

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swiftly. The monstrous head which had appeared to one side of the canoe was still there, but it appeared to have come no closer. Was it watching him? Slowly, Craylix crept towards the stern and the paddle that lay there. The head turned slightly in his direction, but made no other movement. The islander picked up the paddle, tied like the harpoon to the light ribbing of the canoe frame, then defiantly faced the creature. Apart from the bone-gutting knife which lay on top of a spare net, the paddle was his only means of defense. But what of the net itself? Still moving slowly so as not to provoke the fishman, Craylix bent down and shook the knife aside and picked up the edge of the net.

For what seemed an eternity he stood facing the motionless head, the paddle in his left hand, the net in his right. He began to think that it would sink down and not reappear. But, no, at length it moved towards him, arms reaching up to grip the side of the canoe. Craylix waited until it was almost out of the water before he acted. He brought his right arm swiftly up and across, casting the net over the fishman and ensnaring it. The net might not have existed for all the difference it made. The sea beast continued remorselessly onwards, clawing and biting through the tough fibers of the net, and now was even dragging its legs on board.

The islander rushed at the intruder, clubbing at it—once, twice—with his paddle. The third time he hit it the fishman slipped back, catching itself on the net. Most of it was back in the water, and Craylix brought the paddle down once again on the creature's skull. Then the fishman suddenly thrust up one of his own arms, smashing it into the paddle with enough force to tear it from Craylix' grip and snap the line which tethered it to the canoe.

Helplessly, Craylix watched the paddle fly into the air, hit the water again and immediately start to sink. The fishman, too, had sunk back into the sea, but only to disentangle itself from the net. It would be back, and the islander knew it full well.

There was no escape. He had no paddle for the canoe; but even if he had, a fishman could easily keep pace with the fastest craft. His eyes focused on the bone knife. He picked it up. Narrow and sharp, but very brittle, Craylix himself had painstakingly carved it from a shoulder blade taken from the mangled corpse of his mother's brother after it had been salvaged from the sea where the fishmen had abandoned it.

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Holding the knife tight between his clasped hands, he moved to the side of the canoe and waited for the fishman to reappear.

And reappear it did, streams of water coursing down the channels of its bloated face. Craylix aimed at the left eye. Then the eye blinked and Craylix drew back. He could even yet plunge the bone blade home, but still he hesitated. The fishman looked at him, slowly closing its eyes, then opening them. The islander also blinked, licking at his dry lips, waiting to see what the creature intended. One dangerous movement, and his arms would whip forward, thrusting the knife deep into the eyeball.

The eyes closed once again, opened, and the beast slowly submerged itself and was gone. Craylix stood up and looked cautiously down, wondering whether it was a trick. Had the fishman really gone? He waited until his heartbeat had slowed to normal, but still it did not re-emerge, and at last he began to breathe more confidently. He moved to the bows and took hold of a skin flask, opened it, and drank greedily. Then he noticed the harpoon line, set down the flask, and started to haul it in. It came very easily, and even before he reached the end, he knew why. The line had been cut. The harpoon was gone. One of the fishmen had severed the line to free the body of the one Craylix had speared.

Shortly, he continued with what he had started to do before the attack, to pull in his nets and traps and see what they had caught since yesterday. There was nothing. If any fish had been caught, then the fishmen had stolen them, for it could be none other than they who had torn and shredded the nets. Bitterly, Craylix dragged all his nets into the canoe, piling them and the floats and mooring lines towards the bows. They could be salvaged somewhat. The netmakers would unthread the lines and start again. All was not lost.

That was more than could be said for the harpoon and paddle—not to mention the spare net—both of which would be difficult if not impossible to replace. The paddle had been fabricated from two bones bound together, but Craylix had no idea what sort of bones they were. Almost certainly they were not human, they were too large; possibly they were from a fishman or some other sizable sea beast. That was bad enough, but the harpoon had been metal, both the shaft and the head. Metal had only one source: the islands themselves, and there was a limit to how much metal could

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be safely stripped from one's own isle. Craylix knew that the Men would be angry with him. No fish, his nets ruined, his paddle and harpoon lost. He almost shuddered as he thought of the possible chain of consequences which might result.

It was too late to bother now, however. He would see what happened when he returned. But first, he had to get there, and that in itself would be no mean feat. He could see it now if he stood on tiptoe, a light smudge in the distance. Apart from that, the horizon was empty in every direction. He could see no other canoe. He was alone, and somehow he had to reach the island. There was nothing he could use as a paddle, and he most certainly did not intend to swim, towing the craft behind. He was not going to enter the water, not with the fishmen most likely still in the vicinity. In recent months it had become unsafe to swim anywhere. It was not very long ago that two children, barely able to walk, but like all people at home in the sea, had been taken by the fishmen when barely a dozen canoe lengths from the island. Yet Craylix could well remember that there had been no such occurrence when he was an infant. Even the Men rarely saw a fishman, who were regarded more as legend than reality, and never tangled with them. The subsurface dwellers kept well away from the islanders, and it was very rare for them even to raid the humans' nets.

In the end Craylix had no alternative but to use his cupped hands as paddles. It took him a long time to get back to the island, and every few seconds he pulled his arms out of the water lest the fishmen were about.

The foredeck of the island had been well stripped over the centuries, but after he had secured the canoe to one of the floats and climbed to deck level, Craylix stepped sure-footedly across the girders until he reached the central level. Pulling one of the nets back onto his shoulder, he slowed his pace and prepared to face the Men and the other notyet Men.

"Ho, Craylix!" called one of the mahogany-skinned figures squatting there. "First back as usual, and with the biggest catch, I see!"

The speaker was Lervlix—Lervlix whom he used to call friend, now his most hated rival. If only, Craylix wished, it had been the other notyet who had come across the fishmen.

Craylix ignored him, dumping down some of his broken nets.

"What happened?" asked

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one of the Men who sat in a wide semicircle on the deck in judgment on those who hoped to become their peers.

"Yes, Craylix, what happened?" repeated Lervlix.

Another of the Men silenced him with a single appraising glance, and Craylix wondered how well his rival had fared. Badly, he hoped.

"I was attacked by fishmen," began Craylix. "I drove them away, one with my harpoon in its neck. Another I beat back with my paddle." He looked downwards, adding, "I lost the paddle, and they stole my fish and tore my nets."

"A pity, Craylix," commented Man Renlux.

Lervlix laughed out loud, and three or four other notyets giggled.

"Silence!" ordered Man Thonlux, the father of Lervlix. Craylix was aware that he did not like his son overmuch, but he did everything he could to promote his status to that of Man, even though his only purpose was to increase his own prestige: his son's achievements either enhanced or diminished his own reputation. One method of boosting his son's claim to manhood was the denigration of the other notyets' efforts. Craylix prepared himself for it.

"Have you any proof of what you claim?" queried Thonlux, after his son had grudgingly lapsed into silence.

Craylix shook his head. Any blood splashed against the side of the canoe had been swiftly washed away by the sea, and he knew that the broken end of his harpoon line would not be accepted as evidence. "Only my word," he said.

"I suggest you lie!" accused Thonlux gratingly. "There were no fish in your nets, so you fabricated this story as an excuse."

"And," put in Renlux, "I suppose he also tore up his nets and threw away his harpoon and paddle? Come, Thonlux, you do not expect us to believe that, surely?"

"Why not? It is more probable than his own tale. Driving away two fishmen? Impossible."

"That is what happened," affirmed Craylix.

Thonlux sighed loudly. "You have lost your harpoon and your paddle. Your nets are ruined, and you have brought no fish. What do you think we should do with you?"

Craylix said nothing.

"Answer me!"

"I do not know."

"But I do. No fish, so you may not eat what the others have caught. You will replace the harpoon and paddle. It is a miracle that you did not contrive to lose the canoe as

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well. Perhaps it should be taken from you. You would be more profitably engaged on the island, netmaking perhaps."

No! The young notyet's mind screamed out that he could not be confined to the island, else he would never become a Man. Netmaking was a woman's work. Men themselves might remain on the isle, but only because they were Men; they had achieved their status. But no one became a Man by staying at home. Later perhaps, yes. There was water to be distilled, metal to be shaped. That was a Man's work. The womenfolk dealt with the sea's harvest, making food and such stuff. And every so often there was the body of one of the people to handle: the bones for tools and weapons, the flesh for fat and oil. Not one part went to waste.

"Do not be so foolish," chided Renlux. "He met two fishmen and survived, for that we should congratulate him. You would rather he died, perhaps? Then we would have lost the canoe, as well. We cannot punish him for living. That is what you want?"

This time it was Thonlux' turn to remain silent.

One of the other Men, Stevlux by name, said, "I think I can speak for us all, Craylix. You are neither reprimanded nor congratulated. Another harpoon, should you wish for one, and a paddle will be made available, but you must seek replacement for those you lost. Agreed?" Stevlux glanced from one Man to another, and all nodded their assent.

It had turned out better than Craylix had dared hope. If he was no nearer Manhood, then he was certainly no further away.

"Very well," continued Stevlux. "Take your nets to the women, see what can be salvaged."

Shouldering the nets, Craylix turned to leave, and the group broke up. It had only come together shortly before his arrival, for his canoe had been in sight long before he reached the island. As he walked to where the women worked, Lervlix followed close behind him.

"Perhaps Stevlux will not congratulate you, but I will. That was an excellent story you told—how you killed a score of fishmen with your bare hands. Remarkable."

Craylix chose to ignore him.

"They should have made you a Man for that," continued Lervlix. "But instead, I will soon be one, and you will still be nothing but a worthless notyet."

Biting his lip, Craylix continued forward, and soon Lervlix got fed up and left him.

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His mind was a torrent. Did Lervlix speak the truth? Was he soon to become a Man, or was he merely taunting him? If the former, then Craylix would have to do something and quickly. But was there anything he could do, and was there time?

Vivilex was there when he left the nets with the women, but she would not look at him. He could not speak to her, naturally, and after a minute he went away. Perhaps she would meet him tonight, even though she had not been there the previous three evenings. If she was there, then it would be all right. If not, he would go tomorrow, and the night after that, and after that.

He wanted Vivilex as his own, and when he became a Man, she would be named Craylox. But for that he would have to reach Manhood before Lervlix. One of the others might become a Man before either of them, but most had already chosen another. The girl had some say in the matter, but Vivilex would not choose between them. She seemed to enjoy being courted by both and to relish the friction she caused between the two not-yets. For Craylix, however, there could be no other. Sometimes he only had to think of her—long black hair reaching down to ripening breasts, smooth firm flesh, naked except for the necklace of virginity—and he felt his desire growing and had to hide himself lest anyone should notice. And as he thought of her again, once more he determined that when the skin of Manhood was tied around his hips it would be he who took Vivilex' necklace and gave her his name.

The only obstacle was Lervlix, and the other notyet had the double advantage of his father: Everyone knew Thonlux had sired him, and Thonlux was a Man. Yet Craylix had no father who was a Man. Indeed, no one except his mother, who had died when he was an infant, knew who his father was. The father knew it, but he—if he still lived—would not admit it. Craylix was a bastard, brought up by an uncle who himself never took a woman. His mother had never given her necklace to anyone, and his father might not even have been a Man. Unlike all the other notyets, Craylix' origins weighed heavily against him.

To become a Man before Lervlix, the only course that Craylix could think of was to accomplish a great deed. Few now became Men because of a single deed, most reaching that coveted status because over the years they had proved their worth to the people of the island. Bringing in a good

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regular catch of fish was the usual way. But it seemed that recently there were fewer fish, and those that were netted were all too often taken by the fishmen.

If he had brought back the body of the fishman he had slain, that surely would have earned him the title Man. Why had he not then done so? He remembered the other fishman, the one which had kept blinking. He had been too busy concentrating on that one to think of the one he had killed. Could it be that this was what the fishman intended—that his attention was diverted whilst the other dead creature was removed from the harpoon line? Craylix tried not to consider such a possibility. The fishmen were not intelligent, were they? But he could not forget the way the beast had stared at him, as if he was being studied. That, truly, was very odd.

Someone was behind him. Craylix spun around. "Oh," he said.

"I disappoint you?" asked Man Renlux, clambering onto the float and sitting down next to him. "You were expecting someone else?" he continued, smiling.

"No, no," lied Craylix, trying hard to conceal his annoyance. He said no more, staring out across the night sea, hoping that Renlux would depart. Vivilex would never come if she saw the Man with him.

"You had a lucky escape today," commented the other islander.

"Yes." After a few seconds, realizing that he was not going to leave, the notyet added, "Thank you for speaking for me."

Renlux nodded, resting his hand on the other's shoulder. "It was nothing." He paused, removing his hand and scratching at his thin white beard. "When I was your age, and I would not care to say how long ago that was, I do not think any of the people had even seen a fishman. The old ones told stories about them, but you know how much faith we can put in those." He chuckled softly, and Craylix could not help but join in his amusement; he smiled, glad now that Renlux had come.

"But now," continued the Man, "it seems that the world is changing. The sea is turning against us. We bring in fewer fish, many people have been killed by the fishmen. We cannot go on like this. Another few generations and we will all be gone."

Craylix was puzzled. What did he mean? Where would the people have gone? There were

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other islands, other people, what of them?

"The other isles—" he began, but Renlux cut in:

"They, too. Their people as well as ours will die. Perhaps not as soon; but in any case I shall be long dead, and so will you."

"But how will they die? Will the fishmen kill them? Will there not be enough food?"

Renlux nodded sadly. "There are fewer fish. Over the years the shoals have diminished. We will compete for those that still exist. People against people. People against fishmen. And it will not be the people who win."

"Then we must destroy the fishmen," asserted Craylix.

"How?" asked the other simply.

"They can be killed, for I killed one today."

"One, yes. But there are more of them than there are stars in the sky. Do we dive into the sea and swim after them so that they might all be destroyed? Perhaps we should drink up all the waters of the ocean and kill them that way. They cannot live out of the sea for longer than we can stay under it."

"Perhaps," suggested Craylix slowly, "we should use more nets, and position them in the same area, then all the canoes could go out together for the catch. In that way we can protect each other, and if the fishmen are waiting at the nets, they can be killed."

"A good plan, one which I have considered myself."

"Then why not use it?" It was not right for a notyet to question the ways of Men in such fashion, but Renlux did not seem to consider it presumptuous behavior.

"But it is not the way things are done, for how could one judge the performance of each individual notyet? The answer, quite simply, is that one could not. It would be very difficult to put such a scheme into operation, for all would object, preferring to continue as did their ancestors. Even the threat of the fishmen could not make them work together." Here Renlux smiled wryly and said through thin lips, "Could you imagine yourself working the same nets as Lervlix?"

Craylix said nothing for a moment, understanding what the Man had just told him. There was much truth in what he said. The notyet would far rather throw the other young islander to the fishmen than so much as glance at him. And as for helping him reach Manhood by protecting him from the sea dwellers.

"Is it true," Craylix asked slowly, "that Lervlix is to become a Man soon?"

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"It is the first I have heard of it," answered the other, "although it is not impossible."

"And me? When shall I become a Man?"

"That is up to you. To beat Lervlix you must show that you are worthy to wear a skin around your loins."

This was what Craylix had been thinking earlier in the day: That he would be recognized as a Man if he accomplished a single great deed. But what opportunity was there, apart from slaying fishmen and bringing back proof that he had done so?

"But what could I do?" he asked despairingly.

"Metal," the Man told him. "If you bring back metal, that would be a worthy feat. In any case, it has been decided that you must seek replacement for the harpoon which you lost, and your canoe's paddle."

"Another island," said Craylix, and his voice was almost a whisper.

His island was not the only one; there were others, other people. Stories were told of how, long, long ago, there was a single isle upon which everyone dwelt, and this island was as big as the sea. But then, for some reason, smaller islands had been built for some to live on, while others went to live beneath the sea. It all sounded very improbable, but it was a tale told by the old ones to every new generation, and Craylix could not deny that the legend fitted the facts. It was true, as he could now testify, that the fishmen resembled people, and that the islands were very ancient. When he saw how easily the Men took his isle apart, ripping down every surplus piece of that mysterious substance called "metal," he could even imagine that once the process had operated in reverse: That other people had put the metal together in order to build the islands. But who had these people, these ancients, really been? Had there once been an island as big as the sea? Surely not. Think how many floats it would have needed, and many of the people would have had to live right in the middle of the island. They would have been too far from the sea to get fish; so how would they have survived? And with so many people on such an island, there would have been many more canoes than belonged to Craylix' people, and they would have had to venture far from home to seek for fish. Craylix shook his head in bewilderment, staring down into the unfathomable depths which began but a pace from where he sat balanced on one of the huge rectangular floats upon which the island itself rested. No, he concluded, it was

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impossible. It could never have been like that, no matter if the tale was true in every other respect. Doubtless the story had been based on the known existence of other islands and the fishmen, but all else was mere invention.

The young notyet knew that other islands floated less than a day away, not more than three horizons distant. To every side these lay, though it was said that they stretched further towards the rising sun than they did in the other direction. Not every isle, or so it was rumored, still had people dwelling upon it. If such an island was found, then there was a rich harvest of metal for the people who discovered it. Or maybe it was, as Craylix had once heard, that the people of one island had slaughtered all the inhabitants of the deserted isle in order that they might seize its metal. Yet raids on other islands were still rare because of the difficulties involved, although it was far easier for a single islander to reach a neighboring isle undetected.

"Do you—" Craylix broke off. Man Renlux had slipped away without his knowing, so engrossed had he been in his own thoughts.

Craylix did not move, although he was certain that once again Vivilex would not come. His eyes narrowed as he considered that she might be with Lervlix. But that, he knew, would soon change. By tomorrow he would have earned himself the title Man. Or if not, he would be dead. He wondered which it would be.

TWO

In the light of a new day, what Craylix had resolved to do the previous evening no longer seemed so appealing. Yet throughout the day he continued paddling steadily forward, aiming for the point where the sun had appeared several hours before. But the sun had now passed its zenith and was warming his back and shoulders.

He had told no one what he proposed to do, for there was no one in whom he could confide, although Renlux doubtless knew what he intended. He could still turn back and set his new nets, there was time. Instead he continued onwards, going further from his home than he had ever done before.

He had no more than a vague idea of what he would do when he reached the nearest island. Under cover of darkness, he would tie up his canoe alongside the alien isle, creep on board, then—

Then what? He would have to see what he could steal. There would not be much he

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could take, because any metal would probably be too heavy and awkward for his canoe, even assuming he could lay his hands on some. Somehow, though, he had to obtain a paddle and a harpoon; that was the very minimum. There was nothing he could do but wait until he arrived.

His mind wandered as he paddled on, an equal number of strokes on every side; he had to be very careful lest he stray from his course, but he could do this without thinking. It was an easy job to propel the small craft. Craylix had no tides to consider and there was barely any current. Wind was negligible, and the surface of the sea was almost as smooth as a sheet of metal. Every score of days, or thereabouts, the sky might not be as clear, the sea not quite as calm, and perhaps even rain would fall from the almost unmoving clouds; but even so, every islander seemed to know his way back whether he could see the island or not. He had no need to fear that he would become lost, only that he might not see the isle nearest to his own metal home because his course had diverted from true.

And when he did find it, what would he discover? Perhaps he would come across a girl who still wore her necklace, and possibly he could steal her away with him. Such a thing was not unknown. It was said that the grandmother of one of his people's Men had come from another isle. Idly, Craylix speculated on the character of the females to be found elsewhere. Were they more loving, more beautiful, less capricious? He would gladly exchange Vivilex for another if it was at all possible. When she was not around he began to loathe her, as he had been doing more and more over the past few days. Sadly, he shook his head, guessing that the women of one island would be very much like those of any other.

For the first time in quite a while Craylix became aware of his surroundings, realizing how low the sun had sunk. He looked ahead. Slightly to the right, but still a long way off, there was an object in the water. Yet it was not so distant that he could not make out what it was. It was a canoe.

He stopped paddling and stared at the other craft, then sprang forward and lay at the bottom of his own boat, hoping that he had not been seen.

There was no doubt that the boat was not from his island, and a single glance told Craylix that it was stationary. The figure standing up in the craft seemed to be pulling in on a series of fishing nets, but so far had taken no notice of the intruding vessel.

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Craylix decided to remain where he was. There was a strong possibility that the other islander would return without becoming aware of him; there was no reason why he should look around. But Craylix dared not try to get any closer to overpower him and so prevent the alien from carrying back news of his approach, lest he did turn and see him drawing nearer.

As often as he dared, the notyet peered quickly at the other canoe, realizing that his previous momentum still carried him forward. At about the sixth glance he saw that the other craft was also moving. It was coming towards him.

Reaching for his new harpoon, his heart pounding as fast as it had done during yesterday's encounter with the fishmen, Craylix hugged the weapon close to his chest and waited for what seemed an age. At last he heard the slow rhythmic splash of a paddle dipping into water, but still he did not move. Then the paddling ceased, and there was silence for a few heartbeats.

"Rhesmel?" Craylix heard a voice call. Was he calling out the name of a friend? Had he come because he thought the canoe was from his own island?

Craylix jumped up, harpoon poised. The other craft was some two lengths away, and the notyet could make out the subtle differences in the foreign canoe. But the figure standing in the bows was no different from one of Craylix' people. He was about the same age as the notyet, though the garment around his waist showed that he had reached Manhood. As he saw the other spring out of hiding, his expression changed from one of bewilderment to one of surprise, then almost immediately to fear. He moved quickly, going for his own weapon.

He was not swift enough. Craylix' harpoon bit deep into his stomach, its barbed point snapping his spine and coming out through his back. Redness spurted everywhere. Very slowly, reluctantly, he fell backwards into his canoe, setting the craft gently rocking.

Something cold seemed to grab at Craylix—at his head, his throat, his belly. He sank to his knees and vomited over the side of his boat, his insides churning, throat burning.

For a long time he lay across the side of the canoe, his arms in the water. Eventually he rose, washed out his mouth with distilled water, and went to examine his victim. The other islander stared blankly up at him, even in death his expression seemed to ask the question *why?* There were about a hundred fish scattered

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about the dead one's craft, wet with blood and sea water. Lying in the bottom of the boat was a long metal pole, flattened and sharpened at one end, and Craylix knew that here was the harpoon he had to find. There was a paddle, too, by the dead islander's feet. Then there were the fish, the corpse and the canoe itself. He had no need to venture towards the other isle now, for surely there was enough here to make him a Man.

That, however, was not all. Pushing away the other outrigger canoe, Craylix began to paddle to where he had originally seen it, and there he collected all the nets and floats, loading them into his own boat. Returning to where he had left his prize, he secured the two craft by means of a line taken from one of the nets, then started off towards his own isle.

He never looked back, and so did not see the third canoe as it moved towards the spot where his victim's nets had been.

The sun had long gone down by the time Craylix moored the two canoes. The sky was not dark, because of the thin ribbon of stars glowing softly in the heavens. The narrow ring could sometimes be detected during the early morning or late afternoon, but it was only in the evenings that it really began to shine. There were other stars, too, scattered about the blackness, but not nearly so many as there were in the illuminating band that spanned the sea from horizon to horizon, passing directly above the island.

"I see you, Craylix," sneered a familiar voice. "Sneaking bac in the dark. I hoped th fishmen had got you."

Lervlix stepped out of the shadow of one of the main supporting girders that ran from the central float framework right up to the highest level of the island.

"Away, you," said Craylix quietly. He did not want to become involved with Lervlix, for he knew that at the slightest provocation he might slide his harpoon between the other's ribs. He had killed once today already, and that time he had no quarrel with his hapless victim. With Lervlix it was different; he felt no qualms about slaying his despised rival.

"No more fish?" taunted Lervlix. "How many fishmen attacked you today?"

Craylix turned quickly, upending his harpoon, and gave Lervlix a sharp jab in the midriff with the end of the shaft. Lervlix groaned and doubled up, clutching at himself. After a few seconds he uttered something which Craylix did not quite hear.

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"Next time," warned Craylix. "I will use the other end." Then he turned once again and continued the way he was going.

A few Men were already there at the central level, and Craylix said to them, "I have done as you asked. Here, a harpoon. Here, a paddle." As he spoke, he held out the implements he had taken from the dead islander's canoe.

Aware that something unusual was occurring, within a couple of minutes almost all the Men were there, whilst many other people watched from a distance.

"Where did you obtain these, Craylix?" asked a Man, as paddle and harpoon were passed around for examination.

"From one of the people of another island."

At that, many of the islanders began to speak simultaneously, not all of them Men.

"Silence!" came Man Stevlux' stern order.

"I killed him," added Craylix. "I towed his canoe here. His body is in it, so are some nets and a quantity of fish."

Apart from hurried whispers, no one spoke until Renlux said, "You have done well, Craylix. Your capture of a laden canoe is indeed a praiseworthy feat." He glanced around at his companions. "For that, I think, one might be awarded the title Man and the privileges that go with such rank."

"I do not agree," said Thonlux, which came as no surprise to Craylix.

"Do you doubt his word as you did yesterday?" queried Renlux. "I am sure that this time Craylix has brought more than adequate proof to substantiate his claims."

"You know I do not mean that."

"I know no such thing."

"It is a dangerous thing he has done, thoughtless and foolish."

Craylix wondered what he would have said had his own son behaved as he had done, but Thonlux was continuing:

"It is not wise to anger the people of other islands in such a fashion. They will seek revenge, and it will be all of us who suffer."

"Do not be so foolish yourself," reproached Renlux. "Raiding is part of our life, just as much as fishing; it always has been. In any case, this was not a true raid. The people of that island, whichever it was, will not know what happened. They will assume the islander was killed by fishmen. There were no other craft, there? No one saw you?"

Craylix shook his head.

"You see?" said Man Renlux. "They do not know, and we have gained many things by

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Craylix' deed. He has done more for the island than any other in recent times. It is only just that—"

"No!" interrupted Thonlux loudly.

It was then that Craylix took his leave. He had no wish to stay any longer, he did not want to witness another interminable debate. The argument was not really over him; he was merely the excuse for further verbal conflict between Renlux and Thonlux. What he had done today did not matter. A human being had died, and they continued their petty squabbling. Renlux had induced him to go; it had been he who had suggested it, but he cared nothing for Craylix, and Craylix knew it. Why had he never realized this before? he asked himself. It was all so shallow and stupid. If that was what it was to be called a Man, he did not want to be one. Physically he was an adult, what difference did the name make?

He found himself sitting on the float where he usually went, where he sat when waiting for Vivilex. She had not come before, but this time she did.

She must have followed him down from the central level, for she was there close behind him. He stared outwards, not speaking, not even looking at her. She was like all the rest. She ran after him now, now that she thought that he would be a Man before Lervlix. And Craylix despised her like he did everyone else on the island. None of them had ever done a thing for him, he had always been alone. He needed no one, least of all Vivilex.

"Did you really do all that?" she asked him.

"Yes," replied Craylix in a little while, adding harshly, "I killed someone today, and you think that is wonderful?"

Eagerly, she nodded.

"Stupid, all of you. Go and have a look at his body, go and gloat over it, go on. This morning he was alive, a person like anyone here, but not any more."

"Does this mean you will be a Man?" she asked, ignoring his words.

"Perhaps."

"And will I be your woman?" She looked downwards, feigning shyness, fingering the necklace wound tightly around her neck.

"No," said Craylix. "That you will never be." For the first time, he faced her. "Never," he repeated.

She glanced up. "But why?" She sounded surprised.

Craylix did not reply, and when he glanced at her again, he saw that she was crying.

"Go away!" he said angrily. "I want neither you nor your false tears."

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She jumped up abruptly, wiping at her eyes. "I hate you, Craylix, indeed I do. If you ever imagined that I wanted to be your woman. . ." Letting the sentence hang unfinished, she turned away haughtily and started to go.

She did not get far. Craylix sprang after her, seizing the girl roughly by the arm and halting her escape. As he spun her around, her hand lashed out, fingernails raking his cheek and tearing the skin. Craylix slapped her across the mouth, then let go of her, and she stumbled back and fell on the flat surface of the float.

And suddenly Craylix was with her, his hands holding down her wrists, his knees forcing her own apart, doing what he had never done before. She twisted and struggled under him, but he soon realized that she was pulling at him rather than pushing him away.

In a little while, her hands stroking at his scratched cheek, the girl said, "Will I be your woman now?"

"I do not know," Craylix said truthfully. "I do not know."

THREE

After he had lowered the nets and set his new traps, Craylix did nothing all day except lie in the bottom of his canoe and stare upwards into the clear blueness of the unreachable sky.

He did not know whether he had been made a Man, because he had slipped away from the island without bothering to find out. It no longer seemed important. How stupid it appeared that all his life he had waited for the day when he would no longer be Craylix, but Man Craylux.

Much had happened since his encounter with the fishmen, more than seemed to have occurred in the rest of his life. First there had been the other islander, then there was Vivilex. He had killed one human being, and had it been some unconscious act of repentance that had made him try to create another one? His mother had been made pregnant by someone who did not take her as his woman. And now was Vivilex also with child? Would Craylix be made a Man so that he might take her as his own? Indeed, did he even want her? Or anyone?

Once life had been so simple, but it most certainly was no longer.

It was dark when he started making his way back to the island, and he did not welcome returning. But there was nowhere else to go, nowhere at all.

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No sooner had he tied up his canoe and climbed onto the foredeck than he was grabbed from behind by two pairs of arms. He kicked and struggled, but to no avail. Lervlix appeared in front of him, and Craylix guessed that he wanted revenge for the blow he had received from Craylix' harpoon.

"I ought to kill you right now!" snarled Lervlix, and something told Craylix that his guess had been wrong. "Bring him."

The pair of notyets marched him up towards the central level, following Lervlix, and Craylix wondered what was going on. Three or four torches were lit, burning valuable oil, and almost everyone from the island seemed to be gathered there. As he reached the level, all became quiet. Craylix licked his lips nervously. Was it Vivilex? Had she told what he had done? He looked for her amongst the people, but he did not see her.

"There he is!" shouted someone.

"Kill him!"

"Let the fishmen have him!"

Then everyone was shouting and yelling, and Craylix tried to move back but could not.

Four of the Men came forward: Renlux, Thonlux, Stevlux, and one called Eklux.

"Come with us," Stevlux said quietly, adding to the notyets, "Release him and keep the other people away."

"It was a raid," said Renlux in answer to Craylix' unvoiced query, as they reached the highest level, where they could be alone.

"From the island whose chief's son you killed yesterday," added Stevlux, and Thonlux continued:

"So now we must decide what to do with you."

"I do not understand."

"You do not?" said Eklux nastily. "Then I shall explain it for your simple mind. This afternoon, whilst you and most of the people were out in the boats, several craft from another island arrived here. There were not enough of us to fight them, though two Men perished in the attempt. The strangers found the canoe you had taken, and they knew it was this isle that sheltered the killer. They had rafts, and they took away metal and nets, fish and provisions, the bodies of our dead Men, and lastly—" here the Man paused—"they stole all the girls who still wear the necklace, as well as some who do not. And you say you do not understand!"

"They also warned," put in Stevlux, "that they will return. It seems unfortunate that you chose the chief's son as victim, equally so that your canoe was observed."

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Explained Renlux: "The people of different islands have different customs. Unlike here, on that isle there is a single leader. Which island was it?"

"The one to where the sun rises," said Craylix very quietly.

Renlux nodded. "I thought as much."

"Enough of this!" cried Man Thonlux impatiently. "We must decide what to do."

"Kill him," said Eklux. "Or take him to the other island, and let them do what they wish; then they will harass us no more."

"But that will not bring back the people they have taken," Stevlux told him.

"Nor will it stop them from returning," added Renlux. "The only hope we have is to attack them ourselves, and soon, before they expect any reprisal. Only in that way can we get back what we have lost, as well as prove that we cannot be assaulted with impunity."

"I agree," said Thonlux, and Stevlux nodded.

"But what about him?" Eklux pointed an accusing finger at Craylix, who stood almost trembling opposite the four Men. "It is his fault. He must be punished."

"No," said Renlux. "This raid would have come eventually."

"There have always been raids," agreed Thonlux, "but not on such a scale, and during the day, too! Before perhaps a single intruder has boarded the island during the night and stolen some nets or a little metal, but this is different."

"That is because the circumstances are changed." Renlux shrugged. "You all know how it is, how the quantity of fish we catch diminishes, how the fishmen have begun to steal from the nets and even attack our people. It affects those of other isles just the same, and because it is so difficult to fight the fishmen, island will start to fight with island for what fish remain. And with what has happened today, it has already begun."

Eklux spat contemptuously. "That for your theory."

"You deny that there are fewer fish?" asked Stevlux.

"Fewer fish," said Renlux. "Less metal. Soon it will be impossible to take any more from our own island."

"It must be tomorrow night," asserted Thonlux. "Every boat, every weapon, every Man, every notyet must go."

"I shall not. You may kill yourselves if you wish, but I have no such intention." With that, Eklux quit their company and walked away, shaking his head.

The three other Men and Craylix stared after him.

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"We do not need him," said Stevlux.

"We must prepare the people for battle," said Thonlux.

"But first we must tell them there is to be one," said Renlux. "Who will speak to them before Eklux turns their ears?"

"I suppose I must." Stevlux turned to go, and Thonlux joined him, saying:

"I shall accompany you. We have much to do."

And so Craylix was alone with Renlux.

"I am sorry," he said.

"For what?"

"For what I have done."

"Do not be. Fate willed it," Renlux assured him.

There was a strange inflection in the Man's voice, and for a moment the notyet wondered whether it had been Renlux rather than fate who had willed the course of events. He did not seem disturbed or even surprised by the consequences of Craylix' action. And was it not he who had first planted the idea in his mind? But Craylix shook the notion aside.

"What will happen to the people they took?" he questioned.

"They were women; so I suppose they will be used for the purpose to which all women are put. Is that what you meant? We should be able to rescue some of them."

"Do you think so?"

"I do. We shall take them by surprise," asserted Renlux. "Then we will kill as many as we can, take what is ours and as much else as can be carried; then we shall escape in our boats. It will be simple. Did not our attackers meet with such success today?"

Craylix nodded. "But most of the Men and notyets were not on the island. Had they been, then perhaps it would have been different."

"Perhaps," said Renlux. "Perhaps. But we must hide you somewhere, lest some people do not take kindly to the idea of becoming warriors and would rather do to you what Eklux suggested. Come with me."

Craylix followed the Man into the depths of the metal island.

FOUR

Thirty almost identical outrigger canoes, some lashed together and covered over to form improvised rafts, composed the armada which left the island just as the sun's progress marked midday. Some of the canoes had two people in them, but Craylix was alone.

Eklux had already soured the minds of several people, and a number of Men had refused to join the fleet. All the notyets

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had come, however, realizing that here was a chance to prove themselves worthy of being Men. Craylix himself never considered that, nor had he yet discovered if his status had altered since slaying the canoeist from the other isle. Had he thought about it, he would have concluded that any decision had been postponed until the raid was over—successfully or otherwise.

Paddling mechanically forward, Craylix' mind was occupied with the raid's outcome. Perhaps they could surprise the people of the other island, but that would not last long. The other islanders would be on their own ground, whilst the raiders stumbled blindly around searching for what they could steal. And there would be more defenders than when Craylix' isle was attacked in similar fashion yesterday. Two of his people had died then, but tonight's toll would be much higher—on both sides. And for what? Even if most of his people did manage to escape, recapturing what they had lost, then the situation would be no better than it had been before the first raid.

Was it true what Man Renlux claimed? Would the raiders have come eventually whether Craylix had killed the other islander or not? It seemed hard to believe, but perhaps the course of life was indeed changing towards a bloody battle for survival between the people of different isles. If that was so, then it had been wisest to choose to attack immediately, before the other island struck again.

Craylix looked around at the other craft, spread out in a long line and moving parallel to each other, then glanced down at the long straight shaft of the weapon he had taken from the chief's dead son. It had no barb, so perhaps it could not truly be called a harpoon, but he did not doubt that it was equally as deadly. Would he have the chance to find out, or might he himself be impaled upon an enemy lance first? There was no doubt that it would happen to some of them, so why not himself? The thought of his own death did not seem of much concern. He had killed, and despite what Renlux had said, it was his fault that the raiders had come. Was it not only right that he should pay for it with his own blood?

Four remained to guard the boats, while the rest of them soundlessly climbed up onto the strange foredeck and set about their appointed tasks.

Craylix was to search out any of the islanders who were on deck and silence them before they could raise the

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alarm. Two or three other notyets did the same, as the others foraged through the different levels for what they could find, or hunted for the women stolen from their isle. Already the tethered canoes of the strange islanders were being towed away, both for their metal and to prevent pursuit.

Craylix dodged from girder to girder, aware that the layout of this isle was the same as his own. He held the harpoon in his right hand, while the bone knife was stuck into an improvised belt made from a strip of netting tied around his waist. He saw no one except his own people purposefully moving from level to level. He decided that everybody was asleep, and hoped that they would stay that way. But what would happen when the raiders began to search through the dwelling levels, looking for the abducted women? The notyets began to move in that direction, aware that here lay the greatest potential danger.

Halfway there, moving around the back and checking the huge floats on the opposite side from where they had landed, he heard a slight sound behind him. Immediately he sprang aside, and just as he did a harpoon, thrust from the rear, caught his upper arm, biting deep into the flesh. He managed to stifle his cry of pain, continuing sideways until he had put one of the thick struts that rose up to the main framework between himself and his unseen assailant.

Turning, he saw his attacker—Lervlix.

The other notyet came at him again, his harpoon leveled. Craylix slid behind the wide strut, his shoulder throbbing painfully, blood trickling down onto his forearm, and transferred his own weapon to his left hand; the fingers of his right were beginning to go numb. The two islanders began to move in a circle a canoe length apart, the metal support from the float between them. Down here they were in the shadow of the island, and Craylix had difficulty in seeing the other's face and anticipating his movements. Then Lervlix suddenly leapt sideways; Craylix jumped to keep the strut between them; but then the other notyet was back where he had been and coming around the girder. Craylix saw too late that he had been tricked, and Lervlix was in front of him, his harpoon darting at Craylix' naked chest. Craylix stepped back, his own weapon coming up to parry the blow. The two shafts struck, ringing echoingly and sending sparks flying. His right hand was almost useless and he could only hold the weapon in his left. But Lervlix

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came at him again, jabbing his harpoon with both hands. Craylix retreated, realizing that he could not go back any further. Another two steps and there was the sea. If he jumped, his right arm would be no help in swimming, and he would be an easy target for a hurled harpoon. Here, he was too close to Lervlix for the other to throw his weapon. Craylix knew he had to get in close and use his knife.

Knowing that his opponent was trapped, Lervlix approached with more confidence. His harpoon lanced out at the other islander's undamaged arm, and Craylix moved sideways and easily avoided the barbed head. A second time Lervlix tried this maneuver, but as Craylix started to skip aside he realized that it was only a feint, for the harpoon was coming straight at his throat. Swiftly and agonizingly, he raised his wounded right arm, somehow managing to bring it sideways against the harpoon shaft, just behind the head. His improvised defense deflected the murderous metal away from his neck, though Craylix fell and dropped his harpoon, which slid across the float and dropped into the water a short distance below.

Craylix saw a flash of white as Lervlix smiled in triumph at his supine victim, and for a split second, as the harpoon was coming down in its final fatal blow, he imagined himself in the position of the islander he had killed two short days ago: The metal tearing skin and flesh, cutting deep into his stomach, blood jetting out, his eyes glazed and staring.

Then he rolled aside, metal slammed into metal, and he was on his feet, his good hand clutching the knife. Lervlix twisted desperately around, frantically trying to get his harpoon up. But Craylix was already too near, and Lervlix screamed. The sound brought a strange primitive fear to Craylix; it was the sort of call which could summon every dead spirit that dwelt in the sea below. A loud high-pitched howl it was, which cut through the tranquil night like a knife through flesh—and Craylix hesitated a single panting breath before he plunged his blade into Lervlix' solar plexus. Then it was done, the scream cut off, though its echo still seemed to linger on, and Lervlix was dead.

Craylix felt darkness overwhelming him, and he began to fall. . .to fall. . .

The cold water shocked him back to consciousness, and he found himself struggling to the surface, coming up by the side of one of the floats, scraping against the encrusted barnacles and getting tangled in masses of

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weed. He hung there by his one good arm, regaining his breath, but knowing that he would not be able to get out of the water unaided. He could hardly feel his right arm; it was almost completely numb. The only sensation was a slight stinging where the sea water had entered the wound; so he guessed that it could not be as bad as it looked.

All of a sudden he became conscious of the noises drifting down from the island above him. Shouts and yells, metal against metal, a cry of pain. The raid had been discovered; the islanders were defending themselves. Doubtless it was Lervlix' atavistic scream which had given them their first warning.

But Craylix could not stop where he was. He might be safe for the moment, yet once the canoes fled he would be trapped. Clumsily, using his one good hand to hold onto the float and kicking his legs out in the water behind him, he started to make his way slowly around the island. It took him a long time. Too long.

He could make out the shapes of a few canoes in the dim distance, and there were several more craft adrift a few lengths out. Some of the native islanders were already swimming towards these and boarding them, either to give chase or to bring them back to the island. Carefully, Craylix pulled himself around to the rear of the float he had reached, so that no one could see him from the water. If he remained long enough where he was, there was a chance that later he could sneak away in one of the boats being brought back.

As he waited, he counted five bodies in the sea, and none of them did he fail to recognize. He wondered how many of his people had managed to escape. And had they freed any of the women?

When dawn came, there were still people about; he heard them talking not far above his hiding place. To escape during the daylight hours would be impossible, and he did not know if he could last out until evening. His left arm ached from clinging to the float. The sea water, though not cold, chilled him. He had begun to shiver, and every few seconds his eyes slowly closed. It was becoming harder and harder to keep awake. How simple it would be to let go and drift gently downwards; nothing would be easier.

He relaxed his grip, gradually sinking. Then he tried to breathe in a mouthful of water, suddenly realizing what was happening. He splashed his way back to the top, coughing and choking as he reached the surface. He grabbed hold of the

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float again, water running out of his mouth and nose as well as off his body.

One of the islanders must have heard, because not long afterwards a canoe began heading towards him. Craylix did not notice until the craft had almost rammed him; then he dived down under the float. Breathing out, letting the last of his air bubble upwards, he opened his mouth for the sea.

FIVE

The islander was old; he was dying. His woman was in her rightful place by his side. He smiled at her, but she did not return it.

"Vivilex?" he said, trying to sit up. He used his hands as levers, then fell back as his right arm gave way. The pain brought tears to his eyes. The woman's face drifted away across the sea, and effortlessly Craylix floated back into the dark realms of dreamless slumber.

When consciousness returned again, Craylix saw that he was alone. He lay in the corner of a sleeping room, half covered by a worn patchwork of skins and dried sea leaves. Experimentally, he raised his right arm until it was vertical, gently lowering it before looking at his wound. But there was nothing to see, for the arm was tightly swathed with damp weed tied around with much-knotted shreds of netting.

He lay still, and shortly afterwards Vivilex entered.

"How long?" he demanded.

She was carrying a metal drinking bowl which she almost dropped in surprise. The first thing Craylix noticed was that the bone and shell necklace no longer hung around her neck.

Not meeting his eyes, she replied, "Only a day." She set down the bowl on the floor, as if unwilling to approach more closely. Then she added: "You should not have come," and turned and fled.

After another short interval, one of the male islanders glanced inside. Seeing that Craylix really was awake, he entered and sat down as far away from the prisoner as he could, a short harpoon resting across his thighs.

He wondered why they had stopped him from drowning himself. What had they got planned for him? He knew that their chief must have ordered him to be kept alive, although Craylix had never seen him. Nor had he been allowed out of the compartment in which he was kept, not even to relieve himself. He had plenty of opportunity to meditate on what he was being kept for; it had been two days since he had awoken to find himself here.

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There was no doubt that he would be punished for killing the chief's son; so it did not surprise him greatly when the chief himself came to announce his death.

"Tonight," said the chief without preliminary, "you will be sacrificed to the fishmen." The man, whose name Craylix had discovered was Blyffod, had sent away the guard, and the two of them were alone. "I want you to understand," he continued, "that I bear no malice towards you, but that—"

"Then why kill me?" interrupted Craylix. "I am more valuable alive. I can be useful to you; I am a good fish gatherer."

Sadly, Blyffod shook his head. He was an old man, almost as aged as the old ones from Craylix' own isle. "I am sorry, but that cannot be done. You have transgressed," he continued mildly. "You killed my son, and that is wrong. It would be weak of me to let you go unpunished, nor would it be fair to other lawbreakers. Too many people have died because of you, both my people and your own. No, you shall pay for your crimes, and your body will appease the fishmen."

Craylix said nothing for a while. "Does it have to be the fishmen?" he asked eventually. "Is that not a waste of my body?"

Again the chief shook his head. "Every third evening," he explained, "we throw hundreds of fish back into the sea for the fishmen. They know that if any of our nets have been damaged, there will be no fish for them. Tonight is the third evening."

"But what do you eat?" queried Craylix, his surprise temporarily eclipsing the bleakness of his own future.

Blyffod forced a laugh. "We do not throw all our catch to them! We fish in peace and are left alone. In such a way, there are more fish for us to eat and more to give to the sea creatures."

"How long has this been happening?"

The other shrugged. "Many, many days."

Craylix was well aware, as even the chief himself must have been, that Blyffod had found no solution. The position of his people was just as hopeless as Renlux had predicted. Giving out fish was bound to attract more and more of the creatures, but at the same time there would be fewer fish to throw to them.

"So I die," said Craylix, keeping his voice steady, "but how long will the fishmen be satisfied? How long before you have to start tossing your own people into their greedy jaws?"

Blyffod smiled pleasantly. "You do not have to worry about that, my friend." He

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turned to leave. "I shall see you before you die."

"The women you stole from my island," Craylix called out, "are they for the fishmen, too?"

The chief paused in the doorway. "You came to rescue them, did you not?"

Craylix nodded.

"Perhaps you should first have asked them if they desired rescue."

Then he was gone.

And that was the way it had been.

The chief finished what he was saying and came towards Craylix. "Are you ready?" he asked.

Craylix wanted to spit in his face, but his mouth was too dry to gather any saliva. He thought how ridiculous the chief's words were, then managed to say, "Am I to be thrown in like this?"

"If you were untied, would you jump?"

Craylix nodded his head.

"Very well. Set him free."

Unwillingly, the islander who had punched him in the back gave his harpoon to his comrade and began to loosen the thongs which bound the prisoner's wrists.

"And a knife?" asked Craylix.

"No," said Blyffod severely. "The beasts must not be antagonized."

Then the island chief walked to the edge of the foredeck and, incredibly, began to address the fishmen.

As if this were a cue, dozens and dozens of the creatures' heads broke surface, their mouths opened and a deep wailing sound began, gently at first, then louder and louder. As the chorus from the depths commenced, Craylix shivered involuntarily, and he felt the islander who was freeing him pause for a moment. Never had he heard the fishmen make any vocal sound, but this was like the cry of hundreds of babies, all demanding their mothers' milk.

"Brothers from the sea below," began Blyffod, and his voice was almost a yell, "once again we prove how great is our desire to live in peace and harmony with you by scattering an offering of many fish upon the sea. Futhermore, today we also give. . ."

Craylix heard no more. His hands were free, and he sensed the islander behind him step back and put out his arm for his weapon. Then Craylix was spinning around, his left hand doubling into a fist which slammed into the man's belly. He dropped, and Craylix turned on the other islander, who had not yet moved but was staring

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at him in amazement, frozen as he began to hand back his companion's harpoon. Craylix seized the weapon and swung it clumsily at the man's face. That brought him to his senses and he ducked, bringing up his own harpoon. But Craylix was too close for him to thrust properly, and the blow only knocked the harpoon from Craylix' hand. Craylix went in closer, his left hand reaching for the eyes, his right grabbing the knife stuck in the man's belt. In a moment the thick blade was sunk to the hilt in the islander's chest. Craylix caught the dying man's harpoon and shoved its head into the first guard's face; the man, who had risen to his knees, collapsed.

Panting, Craylix looked around. Nothing had changed. No one else seemed to have moved. He could not go forward or sideways because of the sea and the fishmen. His retreat was blocked by the islanders, all of whom looked as if they had been struck immobile. But even as he watched, two or three men began to move towards him.

Blyffod had ceased speaking to the fishmen, and now he turned and saw Craylix backing towards him. Then the retreating man twisted around, and they stood face to face.

"But you promised," said the chief in a piqued tone.

Craylix leaned forward and charged at the chief, his shoulder sending the man staggering back two or three paces. It was enough. Blyffod fell from the deck and dropped into the sea. Immediately, for they had been howling continuously, the horde of fishmen became silent, and the only sound that could be heard was the splashing as they cut through the water, racing towards their victim.

And now Craylix had his back to the sea, facing the oncoming islanders. But the handful of men who had moved were still holding back because their opponent was armed with a harpoon, while they had only bone, and sometimes metal, knives. Slowly, remorselessly, they came on until they stood in a wide semicircle around him. The fishmen began to howl once more.

One of the baskets of fish was by his side. Craylix dropped his harpoon and picked up the woven container. It was not very heavy, and he hurled it at the man coming up on his left. The man sprang back, but the basket hit his hip and fell to the deck, spilling fish all around. Another basket Craylix threw at the islander furthest to his right, then another, and another. Some of the spilled fish tumbled into the sea, but most of the slippery

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dead forms skidded across the foredeck, a treacherous barrier between Craylix and his antagonists. Then one of the islanders did trip upon several of the fish as they slid beneath him from a basket which had emptied at his feet, and, clawing desperately at the deck, he rolled off the edge. Screaming, he hit the water, and the fishmen became quiet for a few more seconds.

Carefully, the others around him crept nearer, Craylix only holding them at bay with his harpoon. Then he happened to look beyond the closing islanders, and he saw that someone had at last thought to pick up the remaining harpoon from the other guard he had slain. The man shouted a warning, and the other islanders stepped aside so as not to block the target. The man took up a throwing position, his legs apart, body sideways, his arm back. Craylix adopted a similar stance, but he did not want to have to hurl his own weapon. If he did, the islanders would be on him in seconds.

The man leaned back further, and suddenly his whole body whipped forward. The harpoon arced towards Craylix. Craylix dived down to the deck, and the deadly weapon sliced through the air above him and angled down into the sea.

At once Craylix was on his feet again, harpoon thrusting and swinging at the people who still pressed closer. The weapon met flesh, but carried through. A choking cry, and a man toppled, clutching at his oozing entrails. Craylix kept on swinging out wildly, drawing blood twice more, then one of the islanders yelled something and ran back towards the higher levels.

Part of Craylix' mind wondered if they had finally realized that they had him trapped here. It was futile sacrificing themselves like this; if one went and fetched harpoons, they could finish him off at a distance. He became aware that they no longer looked at him, but stared down behind him and slowly backed away. Craylix paused, risking a quick glance over his shoulder.

And there, clambering up out of the water, heaving themselves up on the framework which supported the foredeck, were four or five fishmen. Water streamed from their bodies as they clumsily climbed. Craylix stared at them in fascination, watching as immense clawed hands reached over the side of the deck. More and more of the creatures emerged from the sea every second, following the example of the others. One reached out and grabbed at the still-twitching body of the islander Craylix

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had mortally wounded, dragging its prize over the side and dropping back into the sea with it.

As he watched, others pulled their whole bodies onto the deck and shambled forward, ungainly when out of their natural environment, occasionally stumbling and then moving forward on all fours. Craylix rammed his harpoon into the belly of one of the creatures, and it fell back, tearing the shaft from his hand. The human ran across the deck, following those who had been so keen on killing him a few seconds before.

The islanders were pushing at each other, fighting to get to the upper levels, shouting and screaming. But the fishmen shuffled forward in silence. Craylix' eyes darted from side to side, and he watched as the creatures swarmed onto the island and gathered around the bodies of his dead guards, ripping and tearing at their flesh.

Reaching the edge of the deck, Craylix started to mount the ladder to the next level. He halted, looking back, and at that instant something moved swiftly through his hair. He raised his hand and felt the blood from his split scalp. Had he been a rung higher, the knife stroke would have cut half his e away. He ducked and stared at the islander who had wounded him. The man was leaning down from the next level, his blade ready again. Clearly Craylix could not flee the fishmen this way. He jumped down and raced to the side of the deck and started to lower himself onto the float that was there, hoping to escape under the island.

He reached the float safely, for none of the sea creatures seemed to notice him, although many had begun to gather around the ladder which he had just descended. As he clambered onto one of the arched girders which braced the underside of the island, he noticed that several of the fishmen where diving back into the water whence they came. Were they retreating? But others dragged themselves out of the sea. Then Craylix remembered Renlux' words: That the fishmen could only remain out of the water for as long as a man could stay under it.

Craylix wedged himself between the base of the island and the broad girder. Here, he was out of sight of the monsters, even any which surfaced beneath the isle. He felt the top of his head, but there seemed to be little more blood than before. His bound arm showed redness; the wound must have opened up again.

He lay in his hiding place for

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a long time, hearing only the splash as the fishmen leapt back into the sea so that they could breathe. What had caused them to behave in such a fashion? Had they scented the blood from the dead islanders and been attracted by it? What of the harpoon that had missed Craylix and plummeted into the sea; did they think the islanders were trying to slay them? What was happening on the island? Were all the people being slaughtered, split apart by sharp claws? He knew that it must be so.

Gradually he became more and more afraid, his pulse beginning to quicken again. He had to get away from here. It was no good simply lying still. He had to move.

Almost panicking, he raised his arms and took hold of the edge of one of the isle's many girders which ran from one end of the structure to the other, supporting the lower deck from below. Then he kicked out his legs, swung himself forward, and caught the flanged underside of the metal crosspiece with his feet. Slowly, the pain in his arm increasing until it seemed it could become no worse, Craylix squirmed his way forward, feet first, clinging upside-down to the girder. He was aiming for the underside of the foredeck where the canoes were cradled. If he could reach one of those, then perhaps he could return to his own isle. That was all he wanted—to go home.

There was no activity on this side of the island. The fishmen kept returning to the depths around the other side, for that was where they had the people trapped. Craylix dropped down onto the beam between two floats, and there lay the canoes, pulled out of the water lest the fishmen should upset them when they gathered. Selecting one of the craft, he began to drag it into the water. It was light and sturdy, but awkward to maneuver when out of the water because of the outrigger joined to it. Eventually, he got the small craft afloat, scrambled into it, picked up the paddle and pushed himself clear of the island. The sun was low on the horizon, and he began to paddle rapidly towards it, never daring to look back.

Almost he began to hope that he had escaped, but that was not to be. The isle was well behind him when he saw the sea divide a few lengths in front of the canoe. It was a fishman, or the head of one, for that was the only part of the creature above the surface. Craylix ceased paddling, and the canoe moved closer and closer to the beast. Just as it seemed that the craft would ram, the fishman sank down. A second later its

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claws gripped the side of the canoe, and Craylix stood up. As the creature's head became level with Craylix' knees, the islander slammed the paddle down on the beast's skull. The paddle snapped; the fishman vanished beneath the surface.

Craylix did not notice the latter, for he had flung himself into the bottom of the boat and rolled into a tight fetal ball.

SIX

Then he was awake again. The sun was low in the sky, and he knew that was where he must aim for. Using his hands as paddles, he aimed the frail craft at the sunset.

He found a few rotting fish in the bottom of the canoe, which he ate, washing them down with several mouthfuls of bitter sea water. Seconds later he retched, vomiting the whole mess over his legs and ankles. He noticed that the sun was setting. That was where his own isle lay, and he paddled towards it, his hands cupped over the sides.

He drank more sea water, but this only seemed to make him more thirsty. He saw the patch of amber, where the sea had swallowed the sun, and he knew that was where he must go.

Time after time he blacked out, as day after burning day his canoe drifted slowly over the sea. He had to keep going. The island could not be far now. Surely no further than the horizon.

There was an enormous fishman, so huge that it blotted out the sky. It picked up the canoe and began to shake it, and he had to cling to the sides so that he did not fall out.

Then there was a bump.

Craylix stared around him, mostly at the sky, sweat shining all over his body. Gradually, he controlled his shivering and sat up. He looked ahead, and there was. . .something. An island? It looked like no other island he had ever seen or heard about, and it was far too large. On either side it stretched as far as the horizon. Yet there was something familiar about it, and Craylix did not feel afraid.

The canoe was no longer afloat, for it rested on the very edge of the island—a part of the isle which was underwater. Craylix managed to clamber out of the craft and into the ankle-deep water, half expecting the ground on which he trod to give away beneath him. Slowly, painfully, not fully conscious of what he was doing, he trudged ashore. The foredeck was not metal; it felt soft below his feet. He knelt down to examine it more closely, picking up a handful of the tiny pale-yellow particles and staring

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at them very closely. Each little bit felt hard; so perhaps they were metallic after all.

A wide band of the yellow stuff stretched in either direction, bordering the sea until it made Craylix dizzy to look. It was odd to watch the sea wash over the island for a pace or so, and then recede. All other islands floated above the water. Had this one sunk down like a holed canoe? He watched as the water crept forward again. Was the island still sinking? If so, would he not be pulled down with it?

He heard a noise, a distant cry reminiscent of Lervlix' death scream, and he spun around abruptly. But he moved too swiftly, and his head seemed to tear itself apart within his skull. He toppled sideways. Blackness returned.

The canoe was no longer where he had left it. He knew he should look for it, but somehow it was not important. The sea must have carried it away; he would never find it.

To either side was the yellowness, and behind was the sea. But in front of him the yellowness gradually sloped upwards towards the first level, where it merged into a wide expanse of shell-sized objects, and even a few shells. When he reached here, he stopped, suddenly remembering the sound he had heard. How long ago had that been? It was late afternoon now.

Where were the islanders? Had they all fled when their isle began to sink? Yet what had that noise been?

He picked up one of the darker colored smooth oval shapes on which he stood, and fingered it for a few seconds. It was very hard but somehow did not have the same feel as a piece of metal. He did not know what it could be and let it fall.

He was hungry, almost starving, but his complaining insides had long ceased hurting. Instead, there was just an empty aching. His mouth was dry, his lips cracked and blackened. His eyes felt sore, and even when he closed them, it was as if he looked directly into the sun. If he remained where he was, he would die. He had to find food. Something must dwell on this isle, beyond the mounds of more of the yellow stuff which stood between him and the rest of the island. Craylix resumed walking, and he moved carefully for his feet were not used to such an irregular surface.

The packed heaps of yellow particles were not so smooth as the flat stretches, for greenish-brown things stuck up in clumps here and there. Some were as high as his knee. They

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were very thin, and felt like dried seaweed. It seemed to be some kind of weed which grew on the surface, rather than clinging to the underwater parts of the floats. At one group of the island weed he plucked a piece and put it in his mouth, chewed, then spat it out. Beyond the mounds the deck became flat once more, or almost so. But here the flatness was green rather than yellow. Covered almost entirely with island weed, it seemed to continue to the horizon, and he could not see the other edge. Yet the flatness was not without interruption—many clumps of weed were very thick and as high as Craylix himself.

He walked towards the nearest. As he came within a harpoon cast, some sort of creature suddenly cried out and emerged from the mass of dark green weed. It was the sound the man had heard soon after climbing from his canoe. The creature hurled itself out of the weed, but instead of jumping to the ground it seemed to leap into the air—then fly through it like a thrown harpoon, but getting higher and higher without falling. Craylix stared in astonishment. What sort of being was it that could move through the air as easily as a fish swam beneath the surface of the sea? It was about the same size as most fish, too, and appeared to maintain itself in the sky by moving its huge horizontal fins up and down. The man watched until it was beyond his range of vision. It had been in that mass of island weed. Did it live there? There might be others he could catch and eat.

He found no more, but there were scores and scores of tiny red balls joined to the framework of the weed. He pulled one off and examined it. It was about the size of his thumbnail. Had the creature been eating these? It seemed likely. He put it into his mouth, The taste was not to his liking, but the moisture took away the dryness. He started plucking more of the things. By the time he had eaten them all, his hands were red and sticky, dry juice clung to his lips and chin. Having started to eat, he felt hungrier than before. He went in search of more.

After he had eaten as much as his stomach would accept, he retraced his steps to the sea. Once there he hesitated. No purpose was served in remaining where he was, and Craylix felt he had to do something. He began to walk along the foredeck, keeping the water a few paces to his side.

The deck was not level, and neither was it as straight as it had appeared. Here, it jutted out into the water; there, the

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sea had swamped it to a greater extent. Even the very nature of the foredeck changed in places —becoming harder, firmer, darker, before switching back to the tiny yellow particles again.

At one point he detected two or three shapes moving through the sky ahead of him, but the flying creatures vanished over the island instead of coming closer. Were such the only dwellers here? Were there no people? And he was not certain how he would have preferred it: with people or without.

A couple of times he halted and looked back, sensing something behind him. Something or someone. He saw nothing, however, and assumed that he was mistaken. If there was anything, it could only be the flying things and they were harmless enough.

All was so strange, so unnerving. The only thing he could rely on was the sea. With that by his side, it was not too difficult to convince himself that he was not ensnared in the tangled web of some dark dream.

But if a dream it was, the sudden attack brought him out of it immediately, as he was knocked down, his shoulder slashed. Instinctively, Craylix used the momentum of his fall to roll aside. It was as well that he did, for his second attacker dived down out of the air, clawing at his head and missing by but a fraction. Flying creatures! Like the first one he had seen leaping skywards from the land weed—like it, but so much larger. Already the first one, the one which had struck so unexpectedly, had turned in the air and was returning, its huge fins folding back as it angled towards him.

Fighting down his panic, Craylix watched it carefully, never failing to keep a note of the position of the other, while still managing to look out for more of the beasts. They had no way of harming him if he kept alert, he thought. The first attack succeeded only because he was taken unawares. Their claws looked more dangerous than they really were, and if he moved swiftly enough, they could do him no harm. The islander stood up, waiting until the last possible moment before dodging aside as the creature came at him. And as it did so, its legs kicked out, talons raking the air. He was fortunate to have survived the initial assault.

Their bodies were those of children, and very slender children at that. The fins, when spread, were triangular in shape and as big as the beings themselves. They were attached across the shoulder from elbow

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to elbow, although they stretched much further than that. Seeming to grow out of the spine, the fins divided where the legs split from the trunk, but were joined to each leg as far as the ankle. Their feet resembled hands—thin and bony, terminating as the fingers did in long claws. More than anything, they were like people. It was said that fishmen were the offspring of obscene matings between people and fish. Could the same be true of these flying monsters—that they were the product of liaisons between true people and smaller flying creatures like the one he had seen before?

Then the second beast came down at him once again, missed as he ducked, then rapidly unfolded its flesh-like fins to maintain its height. It was useless staying out in the open, for he was both unprotected and defenseless. If he reached the gaps between the higher levels, he would be sheltered by the slopes. The things would be unable to dive at him again; or if they did, they would collide with the oddly rounded, angleless walls as they vainly attempted to fly back up.

Twisting his arm from flinging himself to the ground to avoid yet another attack, Craylix finally reached the next deck, dashing up the first slope, then halting in the hollow before the next steep incline. Surely now they would desist. But they did not. Instead they landed: one on the crest of the rise to his left, the other to his right. Slowly they started down the slopes towards him, their skeletal arms outstretched, claws twitching. Craylix spun around, searching for a weapon, anything. There was nothing. He kept moving, then suddenly ran to one side, between the creatures. He was through them, at the top of the incline and half running, half falling down the next slope.

The beasts could easily move through the air at a speed several times that of the man below. Craylix ran, down and up, on and on, before seeing it was hopeless. He was only succeeding in wearing himself out. He waited in a shallow depression for them to come for him. Come they did, settling on either side and moving towards each other.

Craylix felt the ground settle below his naked feet, as the particles slid between his toes. Abruptly, he knelt down and grabbed two handfuls of the stuff. Flinging one into the skull-like face of the being to his left, he twisted and threw the second fistful into the other's eyes. It was the second one he went for, springing forward and getting it between himself and his other opponent.

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While the first screeched angrily and wiped at its eyes, the man pulled his victim down across his outstretched knee, forcing it back, back. He closed his mind to everything else as he stared into its face, its eyes blinded, its mouth open wide in a silent scream. There was a dry snap and it was dead.

The other creature managed to clear its eyes just in time to witness its companion's fate. It started to turn, unfurling its fins. Suddenly it cried out for no apparent reason, leaned to one side, then toppled over. Slowly, Craylix stepped towards it. It, too, was dead. A short harpoon was buried in its chest. Then Craylix saw the other man, and he knew that he had not been mistaken before. He had been followed; it could be no coincidence that the man had shown himself at the same time that the creatures had attacked.

He wore a garment which hung from his waist almost to his knees. In one hand he carried a curved rod, which was perhaps half his height, and in the other he held a short harpoon like that which had slain the creature. He spoke, but Craylix did not understand the words, and somehow it did not matter. In reply he pointed towards the sea, and the man in turn pointed towards the center of the island. Both smiled.

The stranger retrieved his harpoon, then lifted the dead beast upright, bent and twisted, standing up again with it slung over his shoulders. He gestured for Craylix to do the same, and he did. Next, he started walking, beckoning him to go with him. Craylix guessed that he was being taken to find the other people. The thought of this did not frighten him, for it seemed that it was exactly as it should be. He followed his new ally away from the sea, deeper into the strangest island of them all—the isle of his ancestors.

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THROUGH THE MICRO - GLASS

ISAAC ASIMOV

SCIENCE

I HAVE JUST COME BACK from a two-week stint at a writers' conference in Bread-loaf, Vermont, where I had a very good time. Among the assets of such a place are all the young ladies who are anxious to learn to write, and my attitude toward them was much-noted and widely admired for its suavity.

And then toward the end of the stint, one of the young ladies, to whom I was being very suave indeed, giggled and said, "Oh, Dr. Asimov, you're so levatious."

That stopped me cold. We were sitting on a bench and my arm had been resting comfortably about her waist, but now a cloud passed over the sun of my being. I had never been called "levatious" by anyone, let alone by a mere slip of a girl, and I was disturbed. Chiefly, I was disturbed because I didn't know the meaning of the word.

"Levatious?" I said, "What's that?"

She said, "Oh, you know, Dr. Asimov. The way you go around olging the girls."

From the way she pro-

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nounced "ogling," I learned the system by which she handled words. She got the first letter and the last letter right and let all the intermediates take care of themselves.

"By levatious," I said, "do you mean lascivious?"

"That's the word," she said, happily, clapping her hands.

I was at once lost in thought. I had never considered myself lascivious, merely suave. On the other hand, I thought, I might very well be levatious at that. It *sounded* right—a combination of "laughing" and "vivacious." What's more, it was clearly from the Latin "levare," meaning "to raise," as one's spirits. And indeed, many girls at Breadloaf had said to me, "Oh, Dr. Asimov, your laughing vivacity raises my spirits."

But while I was puzzling all this out, the young girl who had started it all managed to get away.

This shows that words mean even more to me than girls do; which is as it should be for a writer. And it is not surprising then, that in most of the segments of knowledge that interest me, I constantly find myself hung up on words.

Take microbiology (from Greek words meaning "the study of small life") for instance—

In 1675, the Dutch microscopist Anton van Leeuwenhoek became the first man to see tiny living things under his lenses, creatures that were too small to see with the unaided eyes and yet were indubitably alive.

He called them "animalcules" meaning "little animals," but not all the tiny organisms visible under a microscope are active and animal-like in nature. Some are green and passive and are clearly plant-like. Today we call all these microscopic organisms, "microorganisms," a perfectly general term of completely transparent meaning.

Microorganisms come in various sizes, and some are small indeed. In 1683, van Leeuwenhoek detected tiny objects at the very limit of the resolution of his lenses; objects which eventually proved rather less advanced than either the animal or plant microorganisms.

It took another century for microscopy to advance to the point where these tiny objects could be seen clearly enough to be studied in some detail. The Danish biologist Otto Friedrich Muller was the first to divide these tiny creatures into groups and to attempt to classify them into genera and species. In a book by him which was published in 1786 (two years after his death), he

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referred to some as "bacilli," from a Latin word for "little rod," since that was their shape. Others he referred to as "spirilla" because they were shaped like tiny spirals.

In the course of the 19th Century, other terms were introduced. The German botanist Ferdinand Cohn applied a new name to rod-like bacteria that were rather stubbier than bacilli. He called them "bacteria" from a Greek word for "little rod." The Austrian surgeon Christian Albert Theodor Billroth called those varieties that looked like little spheres "cocci" from a Greek word for "berry."

Now for some general terms—

Those one-celled microorganisms which were clearly animal in nature, sharing properties with the cells that make up large animals such as ourselves, were "protozoa," from Greek words meaning "first animals." Those one-celled microorganisms which were clearly plant in nature, and were very much like those cells found in large strands of seaweed, were called "algae" from the Latin word for "seaweed."

But what about those smaller microorganisms, the bacilli and the rest? What general name would cover all of them? Scientists have finally settled on bacteria (the singular is "bacterium") for the purpose, and the study of these organisms is called "bacteriology."

The general public, however, used another name, one which is still popular.

In Latin, any tiny speck of life which can develop into a larger organism was a "germen" or "germ." Tiny seeds were the best examples of this that the ancients knew, and when a seed begins its development, we say it "germinates." What's more, we still speak of "wheat germ," for instance, when we mean that portion of the wheat kernel which is the actual bit of life.

It seemed reasonable, then, to refer to these tiny microorganisms as "germs" too. Somewhat less common is "microbe" from Greek words meaning "small life."

Actually, none of these terms are perfect. "Germ" and "microbe" are too general since there are small bits of life other than those creatures we commonly call by those names. "Bacteria" on the other hand, is too specific since it was originally used for only one variety of those creatures which we commonly call "bacteria." —It's no use, though, no one listens to us logolators.*

* *This one you can look up for yourselves.*

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In the mid-19th Century, the French chemist Louis Pasteur was the outstanding chemist/biologist/bacteriologist in the world. He had explained the mystery of racemic acid*, for instance, and he had learned how to prevent the souring of wine through gentle heating, or "pasteurization." In a very dramatic experiment in public he had, in 1864, shown that bacteria were alive in the fullest sense of the word. They did not arise out of inanimate matter, but only out of pre-existing bacteria. (A fascinating story, but that's for another day.)

Consequently, in 1865, when the silkworm industry in southern France was being ruined by a mysterious sickness that was killing the silkworms, the call went out for miracle-man Pasteur. No one else would do. So Pasteur travelled south.

He studied the silkworms and the mulberry leaves they fed on with his microscope. He found that a tiny microorganism infested the sick silkworms and the leaves they fed upon, while healthy silkworms and their leaves were free of it.

Pasteur's solution was simple, but drastic. All silkworms and all mulberry leaves infested with this microorganism must be destroyed. A new beginning would have to be made with healthy worms; and with the microorganism absent, all would go well. Any reappearance of the disease must be met with new destruction at once before it could spread far.

The silk industry followed orders and was saved.

But this got Pasteur to thinking about diseases that could be spread from one organism to another. Surely this silk-worm-infestation-by-microorganisms could not be unique. Wasn't it reasonable to suppose that infectious diseases were always associated with some microorganism and that the infection consisted in the passing of a microorganism from a sick person to a healthy one?

This notion of Pasteur's has been called, ever since, the "germ theory of disease," and the phrase is a good one. Though the first microorganisms to be studied in connection with disease were bacteria, it has been found that disease agents can be both more complex and less complex than bacteria and the more general term "germ" is just right.

And for that reason, I will refer to pathogenic ("disease-producing") microorganisms as germs in the rest of this article.

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* *See THE 3-D MOLECULES, January, 1972.*

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To dream up a germ theory of disease is fine, but its validity must be demonstrated.

First, a germ of some kind had to be detected in organisms sick of a certain disease, and must not be found in organisms without the disease.

Second, the germ had to be isolated and allowed to multiply under conditions that would give the experimenter a pure culture, one with no other organisms in it.

Third, a small quantity of this culture, when introduced into a healthy organism, should produce the disease.

Fourth, the germ should then be isolated from the newly-sick organism and prove capable of producing the disease in still another organism.

The work of the German physician Robert Koch fulfilled these requirements for a number of different diseases, and this placed the germ theory of disease on a firm footing. No one has since questioned it.

The germ theory led directly to the conquest of infectious diseases. It came to be understood, for the first time, exactly why one should wash one's hands before eating; why one should not place the outhouse too near the well; why one should boil water if suspicious of its origins; why one should develop good sewage systems, and so on. In short, it was no longer possible to equate personal and public hygiene with effete decadence and to suppose dirt to be a mark of sturdy masculinity—or even saintliness.

Then, too, once diseases were studied from the new angle, it was found that organisms developed substances that could counter the bad effect of germs. Such substances could be deliberately developed in animals subjected to the germs. The substances could then be isolated and injected into human beings to help them fight off a disease. Or else, weakened germs could be placed in human beings and, without hurting the body, cause it to form a substance capable of fighting off the germs even in their full strength. In other words, techniques of immunization were developed.

One of the diseases tackled by Pasteur from the standpoint of the germ theory was "rabies." It is a disease that affects the nervous system, and animals that have the diseases show such peculiar behavior that they seem mad. (A "mad dog" is one with rabies and should more appropriately be called a "rabid dog.") For one thing, such animals become unreasoningly aggressive and bite without cause. They seem to be raging or raving, and the word

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"rabies" is from the same Latin root as those two words.

Naturally, with the nervous system primarily affected, there is loss of muscular control. When a rabid human being tries to swallow, his throat muscles begin to contract uncontrollably and painfully. Sometimes the mere sight of water, producing, as it does, the thought of swallowing, brings about the agony. For that reason, rabies is sometimes called "hydrophobia," from Greek words meaning "fear of water."

Although the disease is not common, it is much feared because it is prolonged, exceedingly painful, and almost surely fatal once established. The cry of "mad dog" and the sight of such an animal in an advanced stage of the disease, with saliva frothing about his jaws, will send everyone running, and quite justifiably, too; for if a bite breaks the skin and the saliva enters the victim's bloodstream, he has very likely had it.

There was no question that rabies was a communicable disease, and Pasteur initiated a program designed to isolate the germ in order to find a way of combating it. This involved a kind of bravery that was in itself mad (when viewed by a timid soul like myself). It was necessary to begin with the saliva of a rabid dog, which meant that such dogs had to be trapped, held down, and samples of the saliva removed. Working with angry cobras would have been no more dangerous.

Pasteur got his samples, and when the saliva of rabid dogs was injected into the bloodstream of rabbits, they eventually became rabid.

It was slow work, however. The rabies germ, after injection into the bloodstream, took from weeks to months really to establish itself. A human being, once bitten by a rabid dog, rarely took less than two weeks to begin to show symptoms, and that period of fearful waiting added to the horror of the disease.

Pasteur had to work out some scheme for cutting down on the waiting period if he were to make progress. Since the first symptoms of the disease seemed to be those that would be expected of a nervous disorder, it seemed possible that the delay was caused by the time it took the germ to pass out of the blood and into the nervous system. It would only be after the germ had well established itself in the nervous system that the symptoms would appear. What, then, if the saliva from rabid dogs were injected directly into a rabbit's brain. Then, once the disease was well-established, the brain and spinal cord would surely be far richer sources of the germ than saliva would be.

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All this turned out to be correct. Pasteur, beginning with a sample of saliva from a rabid dog, began to multiply the germ by injecting it into a rabbit brain and then passing it from one rabbit to another by way of the nervous system.

Eventually, he had a large supply of the germ-containing material and was less dependent on rabid dogs and their saliva froth. What's more, as the germ passed from one rabbit to another, it seemed to become adapted to the new species and became less and less infectious to dogs.

Pasteur naturally began to wonder if the infectiousness could be reduced generally. He had weakened (or "attenuated," from Latin words meaning "to thin out") germs in connection with other diseases by subjecting them to unfavorable conditions. What about this one?

Pasteur began to dry infected spinal cord in the presence of mild warmth. On each successive day he injected a preparation of the dried cord into a rabbit and noted whether rabies appeared and how badly. Clearly, the germ in the preparation was being damaged, for the virus was less and less deadly each day. After two weeks, it did not produce rabies at all.

Could the attenuated germ, however, stimulate the body to form a substance that could fight off even strong and virulent germs. It might seem, considering the deadliness of rabies once established, that the body had no defense; but, once established, it might very well be that the germ overwhelmed the defenses. There could be many cases of minimal infection where the disease was fought off before it could establish itself and where the symptoms did not appear and the whole affair was passed off without notice.

Pasteur tested the possibility by injecting his attenuated preparation of rabies germ into a healthy dog and then waiting a good long time to see if the disease would develop. When it was clear that no rabies was produced, the question was whether the dog had developed an anti-rabies defense just the same. To test this, the dog was put into a cage already occupied by a rabid dog. The rabid dog attacked at once and there was a battle royal. The healthy dog was finally rescued but only after he had been battered and thoroughly bitten. It *still* did not develop rabies.

But what about men? How could one dare perform the necessary experiments on human beings, even on condemned criminals. The possibility of accidentally inflicting rabies on any human being was unbearable to someone like Pasteur.

On July 4, 1885, however, a nine-year-old Alsatian boy, Joseph

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Meister, was bitten severely and repeatedly by a rabid dog. The wounds were treated with carbolic acid, but this was known to be useless against the disease, and it seemed wise to bring the boy to Louis Pasteur.

Once the disease established itself in the boy's nervous system it would be too late, but there was a period of grace and Pasteur prepared to work quickly. Here, at least, an experiment seemed advisable, since if Pasteur did nothing, the boy would surely die in agony.

Pasteur therefore began by injecting the most attenuated rabies preparation, and then a somewhat less attenuated one, and then a still less attenuated one and so on, trusting that the body would develop massive defenses before the real germs got their grip on the nervous system. After eleven days, young Joseph was getting virtually the straight stuff. The boy did *not* get rabies and Pasteur was more the miracle man than ever.

(Joseph Meister's end, by the way, was tragic. He grew to manhood and eventually became gatekeeper at the Pasteur Institute, the research institution named for the great man who had saved him and on whose grounds Pasteur was buried. Aged 64, Meister was still gatekeeper in 1940, when the Nazis took Paris. Out of curiosity, some Nazi official ordered Meister to open Pasteur's crypt. Rather than do so, Meister killed himself.)

In all his work on rabies, Pasteur had consistently failed to fulfill the very first requirement of the germ theory of disease. He had not detected any germ in any of his preparations; at least none connected with rabies. Any germ which he did detect turned out to be incapable of producing the disease. (One germ which he detected and discarded was studied by the German physician Albert Fraenkel in 1886, and shown to be the germ that caused pneumonia.)

Strictly speaking, this absence of any detectable germ might be taken as evidence that the germ theory was wrong. Pasteur, however, did not accept that for one moment. It was clear to him that all his work with rabies made sense if he supposed that there *was* a germ. The fact that he didn't see one didn't mean that one didn't exist; it just meant that he didn't see one.

There's nothing either mystical or puzzling about what I have just said. Under the circumstances, the statement is perfectly logical. Microorganisms come in a variety of sizes. Some are so large that they can be made out as clearly visible specks by the

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unaided eye under favorable conditions. Others are smaller and still smaller right down to the stage where they can barely be made out by a good microscope of the kind available to Pasteur.

What a monumental coincidence it would be if the smallest microorganisms happened to be just large enough to be made out under Pasteur's microscope, and if there were no microorganisms at all that were smaller still. Such a coincidence would, in fact, be quite unbelievable and Pasteur did not believe it. He was certain that there were microorganisms too small for his microscope to make out and that it was one of those too-small germs that caused rabies.

But must one depend on eyes only? Is there some way of detecting a small germ besides actually seeing it?

Suppose, for instance, one filtered a preparation which seemed to contain no germs at all, but which was capable of producing a disease when injected into a healthy animal. Suppose one used as a filter something that possessed very tiny holes. If the hole were too tiny to let the germs through, but was large enough to let water molecules through, then the fluid emerging from the filter would no longer be capable of producing a disease. The material left behind in the filter, if washed out, would be capable of transmitting it. A germ would, in this way, be detected even if it were not seen.

A filter of the kind that would hold back objects as small as the average germ was devised by a French bacteriologist, Charles Edouard Chamberland. It was a hollow cylinder, with the bottom closed off by unglazed porcelain. Because of its appearance, it was called a "Chamberland candle."

The first to use such a filter in an attempt to remove a germ from a liquid preparation containing it was a Russian bacteriologist, Dmitri Alexievich Ivanovski. He was working with tobacco plants suffering from a disease which produced a mottled mosaic pattern on the leaves. This was called "tobacco mosaic disease."

If the leaves were mashed up, a juice could be extracted that would produce the disease if placed on healthy tobacco plants. By the germ theory of disease, one would expect to find a germ in the juice, and it would be this germ that transmitted the disease.

Ivanovski, however, could not find any sign of a germ in the juice that transmitted the disease. He wasn't content, however, to dismiss the matter by saying that the germ was too small to see. Less imaginative than Pasteur, he assumed that the fault lay

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somehow in himself, and it occurred to him to use some method other than eyesight to trap the germ.

In 1892, he forced the fluid that carried the disease through a Chamberland candle and found that what came through could *still* transmit the disease to healthy tobacco plants.

This could be interpreted as supporting Pasteur's insight. The germ passed through a filter capable of holding back ordinary germs, and was therefore smaller than ordinary germs, and too small to be seen in a microscope.

Unfortunately, Ivanovski could not shake free of his inability to accept something too small to see in a microscope. His interpretation of the results was that the Chamberland candle he used was defective. Therefore, although he is sometimes considered to be the first to demonstrate the existence of sub-bacterial forms of life, his claim to that fame is a tarnished one since he himself missed the significance of his work.

In 1898, though, the experiment was tried again, this time by a Dutch botanist, Marinus Willem Beijerinck (pronounced "buyer ink"). He also was working on tobacco mosaic disease, and he also used an extract which was capable of communicating the disease but in which he could see no germ. He also forced it through a filter of unglazed porcelain and ended with a fluid still capable of communicating the disease.

Unlike Ivanovski, however, Beijerinck assumed no flaws in the filter. He flatly maintained that he had demonstrated the existence of a germ too small to see in a microscope and small enough to pass through the pores in unglazed porcelain.

Beijerinck had called his disease-carrying fluid a "virus" from a Latin word for a poisonous plant extract (like the juice of the hemlock, which killed Socrates). After all, the fluid from diseased tobacco plants was a kind of poisonous plant extract. Since the tobacco mosaic disease virus passed through a filter and was still a virus, Beijerinck called it a "filtrable virus." It is Beijerinck who ought to get the credit, then, for discovering sub-bacterial disease agents.

Beijerinck, having opted for smallness, now went to the extreme in that direction and maintained the filtrable virus to be a kind of living fluid; that is, to be a form of life with particles of the same order of complexity as those of water or other common liquids.

This, however, proved to be wrong, and the evidence came by way of still finer filters. The British bacteriologist William Joseph

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Elford abandoned unglazed procelain and used collodion membranes instead. These could be prepared by methods that would give them pores of any size. Membranes could be prepared with pores small enough to stop objects considerably smaller than ordinary bacteria.

In 1931, Elford forced filtrable viruses through membranes capable of stopping objects only a hundredth the diameter of an ordinary bacterium. When a filtrable virus passed through such a membrane, the fluid that emerged was non-infecting. The germ had been trapped. It was much smaller than an ordinary germ, but it was still much larger than a water molecule. The filtrable virus was *not* a form of liquid life.*

The term "filtrable virus" applied by Beijerinck to the disease-carrying fluid, was now shifted to the infectious agent itself. The term was shorted to "virus," and this is now universally accepted as the term for something that is much smaller than a bacterium and yet is alive enough to transmit a disease.

But what are the viruses? Just ultra-small bacteria? Or do they have properties all their own that make them a new form of organism altogether?

Well, if I end an article with a question, you can be sure that succeeding articles will deal with the answer.

Coming next month

Dean McLaughlin's novelet THE TROUBLE WITH PROJECT SLICKENSIDE is based on the idea of lubricating the San Andreas fault by water injection; it's a thoroughly inventive and suspenseful story that you will not want to miss. Also featured will be Harlan Ellison with a strikingly different (even for Ellison) story, THE DEATHBIRD. Watch for the March issue, on sale January 30, or send us the coupon on page 42.

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* *Outmoded theories, alas, live on in science fiction sometimes. I remember reading and enjoying a story by Ralph Milne Farley which treated of viruses in Beijerinck fashion. The story, actually called "Liquid Life," appeared in the October, 1936,* Thrilling Wonder Stories, *five years after Elford's demonstration.*

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Paul Darcy Boles ("The Fabulous Bartender," May 1970) offers here a delightful fantasy concerning Charles Dickens and time travel. The great novelist was also an irrepressible actor who ran amateur theatricals throughout his life. Shortly before his death he said his daydream was "a great theatre, in the direction of which I should hold supreme authority."

Droodspell

by PAUL DARCY BOLES

CHARLES JOHN HUFFAM Dickens sat writing in his chalet at Gad's Hill. It was a golden afternoon; bees visited the banks of roses around the stately grounds, their song making a sound that, a little later in time, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, would call "an immemorial murmur." It was the afternoon of June 8, 1870, and so far as the eye could see, the ear could hear, the world was at peace—no noise of the industrial revolution bothered anybody. Sometimes, down the hill, a hackney coach went clapping; but above the trees this could not be seen from the chalet, where all was at peace except for the steady whisper of Mr. Dickens's pen.

At fifty-eight he was a small cyclone of a man, fierce and bright, in spite of the pain that had been bothering him lately and a little dragging of his left leg after much exertion. He had walked more than most men—even very active men—walk in their lives; he had climbed mountains as though these were toys in a nursery, skipped along dark roads where murders were said to have been done, taken his friends on walking journeys through mire and sleet, prowled all London in every furrow and cranny he could find. Walking, he felt in his quick bones, always did him a good turn—took the misery from his mind, the loss from his severely battered heart. For, at present, none of his children lived at home, and some had said, openly, that they hated him; his wife Catherine, Kate, main-

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tained residence in another place; only his sister-in-law, Georgina, stayed to supervise the operation of the house, to soothe him and comfort him in what were, he definitely thought, not his declining years.

For a moment, now, he kept the pen from the paper—there were sheafs of it at his elbow, his faithful inkpot was full, his pen was ready and poised—and hung, as it were, suspended like a hawk between composition and meditation; his eyes burned with a bright light like dark lamps from which might leap a kind of lightning. His small fashionable beard quivered. His handsome clothing, the latest from London, was spattered with light and dark from the sun falling through the lattice-work of the chalet porch. Behind him, in the formal and slightly stiff house that looked down on the chalet, he felt a sense of rigidity of purpose—as though the house demanded upkeep; as though it were a guilty deed to hold fire from the work of writing. Or the fervor of writing. In this same moment his mind ticked back over the circumstances surrounding the transportation and building of the chalet on these grounds—the small, pleasant and rather exotic building had been a gift from a friend and well-wisher. And, also in the same moment, he recalled the Italian workman with whom he had talked after the chalet was in place.

The workman had been a dark small man with hair like curly horns. An air about him of brimstone and honey. An ageless expression like a monkey which had lived through many times. Turning around from driving a last neat nail, the man had said, "You will write well here, signor. Your work will prosper. It is touched with a magic, this little building—it is of the earth old, the gods young."

The man who had written a Life of Christ for children certainly couldn't let that go without a comment. Drawing himself up tidily, staring down at the workman, Mr. Dickens had said, "My good fellow, I'm afraid I don't share you belief in a so-called *magic*. Legerdemain, perhaps—I know, I am not a bad practitioner of the art myself—" (And for a flash then, with deep regret, he remembered all the *magic* entertainments he, with young Wilkie Collins as assistant, had put on for the gasping and adoring and entranced family; the magic fire, the paper flowers that popped from nowhere, the wonder in the eyes of the children.) "—But real magic, never. You are, I take it from your features and race, probably a Roman; as such, you

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should cling to Mother Church and forget this talk of dark arts and traffic with the devil."

The workman had ducked his head. His eyes narrowed. "Mr. Great Dickens, you do not know. You do not understand. Come, let me show you here—"

Dickens found himself following the man inside the chalet, where there was ample room to write, to walk about, to sit, merely, if one were so inclined, and absorb the odors and the peace of any good daylight.

The man hunkered near the floor, where at the seventh board from the east there was a mild indentation in the wood. "You never hear of time travel, Mr. Dickens, because you are the so great reformer, the so wonderful true writer, the man who give us Little Nell, Oliver, the wonderful Davido, the people who dance from your pen and talk so wonderful—you are in your own time and past time, but never do you think of the time in future—maybe only you think of that as someplace where there are no more workhouses, no more prisons for the debtors. No more evil schools where children die of no loving. But the magic which someday—maybe the year 2000 something—people will call science, this you do not comprehend."

Dickens laughed with a ruddy look. "My dear man—"

"Do not irritate, do not get mad, sir. I tell you, this house, this little chalet place, was first built by a man who know all this. When he hear it is going to Mr. Great Dickens of England, he put all his special thing in it—and he is a great scientist, he look both forward and back; in my home town he still live, though people think he is dead a long time before; his name is Cagliostro."

Dickens searched his accurate memory, his marvelous brain for detail. "A charlatan, my man—!"

The workman shrugged. "So, so they say. All I know is, when I am a little boy I meet him, I help him—I, who am stupid, help him with some experiments, you call them—and he show me a few things. And he tell me to show you that when you press this place in the floor, with the long finger on the right hand, and shut the eyes and think of *tomorrow*—then you go to tomorrow. You go a hundred years, two hundred, what you choose."

Bending over the workman, staring at the very small indentation in the shining board, Dickens said, "And how do you come back?"

"Ah, there we have it." Sun washed the swarthy olive face. "You are then two people—one of you, the one in time now, he

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stay *here*—he can walk about, breathe, eat, write, he is real in all respects—but the other one, the one in time to come, he also is real. He is himself. And it is the one who remain, the one in time now, he who must touch with the long finger this so little place in the board, and call his fellow brother man who is himself back. He must think himself backward to here."

Dickens sensed a story; he was smiling now, not irked. The fellow was touched, crazed; what he was telling his better had nothing to do with the way life was lived. The fellow had everything addled; he had heard, no doubt of that fakir, Cagliostro, and had dreamed about it until his wits were gone. But Charles Dickens humored the man.

"I see. You are, so to speak, in two corporeal bodies—one here, the other wherever you project yourself. And the body you leave here must be the one responsible for bringing the other body, the one flung into future time, back to this place—it must be done by the body existing here and now."

"Sir, that is it. Si. Think of how you may travel, then, while staying here at home!"

"Have you ever tried it?"

The workman straightened, staring at the tiny indentation, making the sign of the evil eye. "Not for me, Sir Charles—"

"I am *not* a knight," said Dickens crisply.

"Not for me, great sir, not for my likes—but for you, who have the imagination, who are a poet, who soar with the words to touch the heart—"

"Bosh and nonsense, balderdash and flummery," said Charles Dickens. "I do advise you, my dear man, to get all this foolishness out of your head. And now, if you don't mind, I'm terribly busy—we have friends coming in at three, and we'll go walking in the nearby lanes and streets—I thank you," he said kindly, "for your story, but I must point out that I don't believe a word of it. Good day."

He turned and walked back to the large house from the chalet. The workman stood looking after him. But he did not look around; he plunged himself into a series of talks, walking parties, and projects. The last speaking tours—the famous Dickens readings—had taken a great deal out of him, even if they had put thousands of pounds into the coffers. The coffers continually needed replenishing. Until this afternoon he had not even allowed himself to think of that minor indentation in the chalet board, the seventh from the wall on the east.

He thought of it now. The

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book upon which he was engaged—it was selling well in magazine serial form, people were terribly intrigued by the mood of detection in it, one or two characters were coming along very happily, very happily indeed—was laid in a cathedral town, somewhat limited as to scope, as it took a lot of driving imagination—the real old white heat, the genuine Greek fire—to keep the people moving and to keep the tangled threads at all straight. It was called *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, and sometimes, walking in his study—or here in the chalet—with his hands behind his back and his brow furrowed, Mr. Dickens did not know quite what to make of it himself. Was Jasper a murderer, or merely a man who had dabbled so deep in black practices that he thought like one? What of Rosa? For that matter, what of Honeythunder—an excellent character, a real hypocrite of the Uriah Heep stripe, but louder? Yet he felt the threads drawing together, somehow, in spite of all this doubt. If only—

If only he could see, simply riffle through, the *completed* work bound in published form! Then he would be able to see how it came out, and to return here and write with a great will. He had had moments of vast doubt with certain other of his novels (*Barnaby Rudge* was a case in point), but they had always been overcome, at last, in a burst of rushing enthusiasm when all the people in them drew together and exploded; and if, even then, there were one or two people and situations left over, no matter, it made a thriving bundle of wonder.

But *Edwin* was a real bother. Sometimes he thought that he had, at last, boxed himself in—written himself into a corner. In these flashes of desperation (they only lasted for seconds) he felt trapped and cornered—not to finish a book! To disappoint all England and America (even though the Americans would no doubt pirate several editions, damn them, and not pay him a shilling for the work of the heart's blood)! But not to deliver on schedule—it couldn't be thought of in the same breath with the name, Charles Dickens.

He found that he was staring at the paper. He had just finished a very nice scene indeed, in the present tense, full of the contrast of spring sunlight with the tombs in the cathedral, and touched with birds' wings. And he had taken up the thread of narrative once more. Now, as he stared, with the bees *brooming* around the roses past the lattice of the chalet, with the whole after-

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noon one dreaming, calling joy—now as he stared he realized, with a sickening dark feeling (a feeling as though he were back at the blacking factory, putting corks in bottles, a child bound over to menial labor for the rest of his days) that he didn't know at all where he was going. He had made very few notes for *Edwin* and during the rush of work on it had discarded most of these.

The paper lay inviting but blank as death beneath his hand.

He got up, sun whirling about his head, catching white streaks in his beard, blinding him for a moment. He turned and, hands behind his back, walked five or six steps toward the chalet door. He would go back to the house, read for a time, perhaps rest. It would all come back then—the people would come talking, talking, the scenes would unroll as they had when *Pickwick* came into being—all there, spread out in a country of marvel under his eyes, so that all he need do was transcribe the miracle.

How vast had been the fountains of his energy when he was in his twenties and with *Pickwick!* How he had felt London roll up at his feet like an Arabian carpet when writing *A Christmas Carol!* He had always been the pursued by his own genius, never the pursuer—it was only a matter of letting it catch up. But now—

He found himself staring at the small indentation in the seventh board from the wall, on the east. Light flicked it, a dancing light—perhaps from a butterfly moving beyond the chalet. It was a warm promising light. England in June—this moment in everlasting time—but time was not everlasting; one was fatigued, deep in the bones, by the constant readings, by the expense of time and spirit put into rendering The Death of Little Nell and The Murder of Nancy by Bill Sikes; one was drained by all the memories, broken-hearted (though one did not show it and the upper lip remained fiercely stiff) by one's own children, one's own wife, one's own mistress, Ellen—he shied away from the word. He was her protector, and God knew he had done his best by her. He had put her into two books as a tender fluttering spirit; yet, yet—there was no earthiness in her, she complained that he had ruined her life. Darkness rolled behind his eyes. It was like the chasms of the deep in which Steerforth, golden Steerforth, had foundered.

He walked over to the board.

Presently he bent over and touched the indentation. He used the middle finger of his right hand. He shut his eyes.

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Just one look into *Edwin* as it would be when completed.

Of course nothing would happen. In a shower of seconds he would stand up again, sun swimming around him, and either go to the house or return, here, to his desk.

His life seemed balanced upon a pinpoint. Blood was rushing around his ears. He thought, *Tomorrow—say a hundred years from now—in some city where they have a good library.*

He had no doubt whatsoever that in a hundred years his books would be in good repute with millions of men.

He felt himself falling, and splitting in two simultaneously. Yet it wasn't a bad fall, and there was no rending feeling—just a floating apart of himself, like the petals of a flower moving on a light wind.

Then he was standing before a girl who was dressed in very sleazy, skimpy costume indeed. For a flash he thought the poor creature was in rags, but they were brisk bright rags, and they scarcely covered her thighs. She said, "Yes sir? This is the reference department—"

"Dickens," he said resonantly. He felt better—as though released. The nagging pain in the left leg seemed absent. Perhaps—what had the workman called it?—perhaps time travel made you feel younger.

There were stacks behind the desk—tiers of books that rose grandly to the ceiling, the topmost tiers nearly obliterated by height. From somewhere outside came a thrumming sound as though the bees he had so recently left near the chalet had grown by leaps and bounds and were taking over society. He could not place the rumble. The girl, who was blonde and blue-eyed, said softly, "I like that sort of Edwardian suit on you. I think older men look nice in right-now things."

"Edwardian?" He glanced at a lapel. "Our Queen is—" He was about to say "Victoria," but swallowed the word.

"Dickens, Charles Dickens," he said. "I'd like to look at *The Mystery of Edwin Drood.*"

"Did you wish to check it out?"

"Ah—ah, no, I don't believe so, miss. I'll look at it here—"

She turned with a twitch and gave the order to a boy, writing it on a slip of green paper. Charles Dickens drummed his fingers on the desk. "Do you have much call for it?"

"Oh, Dickens. Yes, sir. There's a real resurgence in him now. I think it's because of the social messages—"

"Do not people read him for joy, for entertainment?"

"Well—" A pencil touched

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her underlip. "I don't know—there was that essay about him by Edmund Wilson some years back, *The Two Scrooges*—it made him out to be pretty violent, probably a repressed schizoid and paranoiac with a little of Billy Sikes *in* him, you know, he loved murders—"

"Demınition bow-wows!" said Charles Dickens. He added, quickly, "A quote from one of his own works, my dear—Mr. Mantalini, in *Nicholas Nickleby*."

"You must be a Dickens nut."

"Beg your pardon, my dear—I—" He revolved the phrase. How sweet and swift it was. "Yes, I'm a Dickens—nut."

The volume came back to the desk. "There you are, sir. I hope you find what you want. There are free desks and tables over there. Take all the time you want. I still like that suit on you," she said as he moved away.

He sat down at a table occupied, at its other end, by a dark youth with a positive burning bush of hair, who was singing something that might have been a tribal rite song, under his breath, and reading a book whose cover said—if one could believe one's still very good eyes—that the contents would explain everything about sex one really wanted to know.

"Pfaugh," murmured Charles Dickens. He opened *Edwin.*

There was a preface. It seemed rather prolix to him, and he skimmed it hurriedly. He opened his eyes wide once or twice. What caddish enthusiasm! What strange readings! It was as though the preface writer wished to take him apart, split him chine from brisket like some butcher in Eastcheap.

He got to the meat of the book, the grand opening scene of opium smoking—it stood up well, it gripped him. He fluttered pages. The sound of roaring bees, gigantic things, kept up outside the windows, but he couldn't see out from here. What was his other self, his *Doppelganger*, doing? Pacing about the chalet, no doubt, or sleeping and waiting. Was his other self thinking about *him?* In the house Georgina, plump, dependable Georgina, would be preparing dinner, supervising it as the cook fixed it—all at Gad's Hill would be safe and solid and sound, he knew that. He pressed on. There we are—the final scene, there in the cathedral on the spring day, a very pretty bit of writing, and the narrative beginning again—and—

Dead stop. The book was finished. It was over. Or rather, it was unfinished. It would never be over.

A wave of cold passed down

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his cheeks as though his head had been thrust into a mountain spring. *No!*

He held his breath, and went back to the preface. *This unfinished novel, about which critics have speculated and fought for more than a hundred years.*

He had missed that before.

He stood up, not shakily but as one in a walking dream.

He slammed shut the book.

As he did so the book flapped open again, rebounding from the force with which he had shut it. And another line of the preface leaped up at him.

Upon his death on June 9, 1870, at Gad's Hill, the novel was left incomplete—

"No," he said.

The young man with the concealing hair said, "Something wrong, dad?"

He didn't hear him. He bent over the book, willing the words to change, to say something else—then, gradually, his vision cleared and he shut the book again, softly.

He found his way to a high, arched door and walked down a broad flight of noble steps into the street. But not entirely into the street, because these vehicles moving past—moving at an astounding rate of speed, and that was where the bee sound came from too—those vehicles precluded rapid street motion. Except where they were gathered in knots, one hooting at another, all caterwauling by mutual consent. The great buildings loomed and aspired to shut out clouds, though you could still see clouds, floating up there innocently in the June dayshine. . .

He walked along, following the crowds, swept by them. He passed something whose sign said it was a boutique, something else in whose window a machine with a framed picture, in blatant colors, played, and from which sound came, "All right, you've won three hundred dollars and now you'll want to try for the next category—" He stopped to watch. A young man who looked as though he were emulating the statue of *Apollo Belvedere*, but dressed, said to someone who was trying to win all these American dollars, "—Name one novel of Charles Dickens."

The contestant thought. "*Paradise Lost,*" she said at length, tentatively.

Dickens winced. But, as long as they're in the libraries, he thought—and that ill-dressed librarian was quite knowledgeable—

No doubt it was an American entertainment, the accent of the young man in the moving, speaking, colored picture had been American, he thought, as he moved along.

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But this was London. Now and then he could recognize flashes of it as he walked—as though it had been overlaid by so much building, some gimcrackery and some proud and noble, that it became a vast puzzle to find out exactly where one was. A bus came lumbering, and people boarded it—he felt in his pockets for coins. Drat, they were all in the house at Gad's hill. He hadn't so much as a florin. He was growing desperate, but he put the feeling down. There would still be time for his other self to call this self back. Today was June 8, and the other self hadn't expired until June 9. So he could go back—he could die in peace, or if not in peace (no, not in peace any longer) in the decency of a known milieu. That would be something.

He stopped, on a corner beside a cafe. Or a place that looked like a cafe. Young men were eating and arguing at a table inside. He saw them without seeing them. Another, terrible, overwhelming thought had come to him—oh, he should have grilled that Italian jackanapes, he should have asked *all* the questions. When his other self died, would this self die as well? Somehow, as he asked it of himself, he didn't think so. He felt fresher, nimbler all over—as though he had shucked off age in the time travel experience and had little to do, save for outward looks, with that poor bedeviled world-famed creature in the chalet at Gad's Hill. . .

He leaned in the doorway of the cafe. A smell of liquor assailed him. It was a living scent, and the voices behind him were vivid and vibrant.

"You can't do it, mate—you can't fill the part. I don't care if you took Olivier at his best, Gielgud, whoever—even John Moore—nobody looks like him today; I've studied the photographs till my eyes weep—"

"And nobody can act like him," said another, moodier voice. "Nobody could have that *panache* when he read—Emlyn Williams got a little of it, but—"

"I'm still looking," said another voice, dogged and deep and also fairly young. "It could be the best picture you ever laid your pretty little eyes on."

I think, somehow, I'll go on living, thought Charles Dickens. There was no reason why this self should die. Unless the other self, with which there was obviously no communication now, called it back. He found that his hands were clenched. He hoped against hope that the other self, back in the chalet, would give *this* self plenty of time.

Magic, science—he would always believe in it now. It could, obviously, do anything.

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A thrill of joy coursed through him like a shaft of light. Man could do anything. That was obvious too. Perhaps there were wars, perhaps the world might be growing soiled—but man might, if he used his head and hands, find a way to get around those things too. He felt more radiantly optimistic than he had even when writing *Pickwick*, when Kate had been young, when London had been a hive for his plunder, grateful to him, crying for more of his being.

He turned around. There were three young men sitting at a table near the door. Two of them wore dark glasses. He nodded to them and gave them a wave of his hand. "Good day, gentlemen!" he said blithely, starting off.

But the largest young man, who looked as if his bones had been put in with a lavish hand, was standing, nearly knocking over the table. He, and the other two, were staring. "Stop!" the big-boned one called. He looked as Joe Gargery might have looked in his youth, but sleeker; still there was that honesty and that reaching, behind his dark glasses.

"Sir." The big young man was at his side. Dickens stood obediently. "Sir, I know this is crazy—but we were sitting here, sir—no, we haven't gone off our noodles, it's just that—"

"It's only, sir," said a second young man, in a navvy's sweater, with long hair curling around his ears and some sort of lens hung by a cord around his neck. He had a hand on Dickens's shoulder. "Only we've been trying to cast a movie, we've been searching for a long time—will you come back in here, sir, have a drink, a spot of chat?"

"A small beer," said Charles Dickens. "I do have a slight thirst."

The large-boned young man stared at the other young man, and both young men stared inward, in the cafe, toward the other young man, who was seated and waiting. "Colin, did you hear—" The large-boned young man gripped Dickens's firm shoulder. "Will you say that again, or say something—"

"If you will, sir," said the young man in the navvy's sweater, "just say, 'It was the age of darkness, it was the age of—'"

"It was," said Charles Dickens, in his best intense, flashing platform style, fixing the young man with stern eyes, "the age of darkness, it was the age of light."

They were leading him back to the cafe, and inside. He sat down. He laughed at their shocked and incredibly happy faces. "It is a far, far better thing I do," he said.

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He stopped. "Would you like Sikes and Nancy? Mrs. Jarley's Waxworks? Quilp, raging at his wife? Or Fagin in prison? David's walk from London? Anything, gentlemen—"

A waiter came, took orders, and left. The largest young man said solemnly, "Where've you been—no, don't answer, it's better you dropped from heaven. We're doing the life of Dickens, we have all the front money together, it's a sure winner, a movie, you know—"

Charles Dickens did not know. But he would find out; he nodded gravely.

"—And," said the medium-sized one in the sweater, "for a year now we've searched for the lead. But you could play it, that voice, that air, the way you look, of course you know this—don't mind me, I'm gabbling—what's your name, sir?"

Dickens considered. It would hardly do to speak the truth out loud and bold. A good actor's (what were movies? they sounded like magic lanterns!) mind must be assessed by the populace as clear and straight-thinking; one could never be thought of as daft.

"Daniel Plornish," he said.

They shook hands all around. What an art this "movies" must be—the young men had an enthusiasm as catching as smallpox. It jumped and bubbled with their talk, and they said something of signing him to a contract, at once, with so much money in advance. A keen businessman, Dickens listened with pleasure and sketched in a bit of his past life (all made up on the moment) without any trouble.

"Perhaps," he said diffidently at one point, having gathered that these "movies" had to do with writing as well, "I could help with the scribbling? I have had some small experience as a scrivener, I am a rather quick court reporter—"

"So was the old boy himself," said one of the young men. "I dunno—there's something just too good about this, I hope you won't vanish in front of my eyes—"

"I'll try not to," said Charles Dickens, fervently. He looked around. Out on the boulevard the vehicles were flashing. A lovely girl with bright eyes and dark hair, looking as Kate had looked in the eye of his mind before he had married her, strolled past. "I want to work with you," Dickens said, like a pledge and a plighted troth. "I want to work in this world!"

On the evening of June 8, 1870, at Gad's Hill, Charles Dickens got up from the dinner table, staggering, obviously in dark straits. Georgina was able to lower him to the floor. His

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speech was impeded by the stroke, but she did manage to make out the words, "On the ground." She could never know that this referred to the floor of the chalet where he had been busy all day at *Edwin Drood*—and, specifically, to the seventh board from the wall on the east, which bore a small indentation.

He died the following evening, on June 9, at about ten minutes past six, never having regained real consciousness or the power of speech, with some of his children gathered at Gad's Hill and with a world sorrowing.

In London right now a film is being made. A movie, if you don't mind the Americanism which most of the young film makers use. It is under wraps because it is supposed to be so masterful. They say (those who are in the know) that this, the life of Charles Dickens, has a star so brilliant he will rush across the heavens as Dickens himself did with his first wondrous book, the noble *Pickwick*. They say the gentleman who takes the lead, called Plornish, writes on the side—that he has already improved the script beyond all telling, and that, shortly, he intends to begin writing a fresh script for another film—the one roughly based on Dickens's own unfinished *Edwin Drood*. He is said to have plans for starting his own film studio, too. But those few who have been allowed to talk to him claim that they are most deeply impressed by his plans for this new *Edwin Drood*, and by the fact that when he speaks of it he claims he has a new approach, which will span over one hundred years, with a completely novel ending. He is a man proud to be alive, enthusiastic as a child, and overwhelmingly gifted.

They think he will deliver.

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